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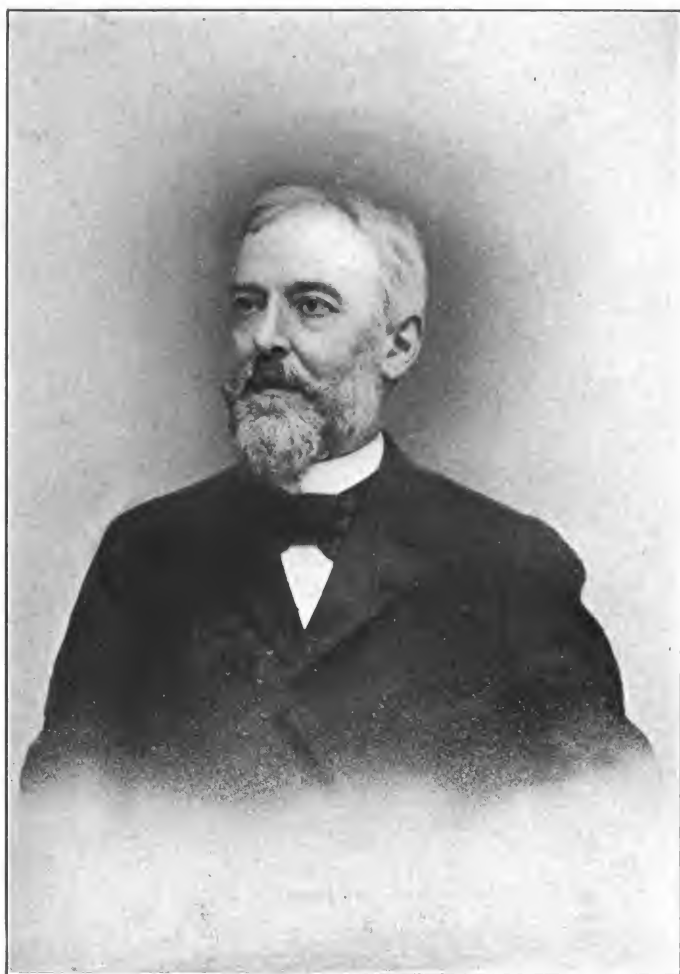
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Back to the World

Journal de Lagrèze

TRANSLATED FROM THE
FRENCH OF CHAMPOL'S "LES REVENANTES,"
BY L. M. LEGGATT

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PUBLISHERS' NOTICE

In a preceding work, "*Sœur Alexandrine*" ("For My Name's Sake"), the author dwelt on the gap left by the banishment of *Sœurs hospitalières*, or nursing Sisters. In the present, "*Les Revenantes*" ("Back to the World"), which is in some sort a sequel to "*Sœur Alexandrine*," he describes the fate which awaits contemplative nuns when driven back into the world.

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CONTENTS

	PAGE
CHAPTER I	
VALEDICTORY	9
CHAPTER II	
AMONG THE LIVING.....	28
CHAPTER III.	
THE CABINET MINISTER'S DAUGHTER.....	45
CHAPTER IV	
THE TRAP.....	71
CHAPTER V	
AN OPPORTUNITY.....	96
CHAPTER VI	
THE LOURDES EXPRESS.....	120
CHAPTER VII	
THE DEUAULTS	145
CHAPTER VIII	
DEFENSELESS	176

	PAGE
CHAPTER IX	
AN AWAKENING	201
CHAPTER X	
RESCUE	225
CHAPTER XI	
FIANCÉE	245
CHAPTER XII	
THE SECOND SELF	270
CHAPTER XIII	
THE WHITE BOUDOIR	292
CHAPTER XIV	
IN THE SHADOW OF DEATH	321
CHAPTER XV	
LIFE	349

BACK TO THE WORLD

CHAPTER I

VALEDICTORY

THREE nuns, their hands crossed under their choir mantles, trailing behind them violet habits covered by white scapulars, and wearing serge veils, which left their faces in shadow, came into the chapel by the choir door. They walked with gliding steps, and after a genuflection before the altar, entered their stalls, knelt down, and then stood up. These movements were gone through with perfect regularity, and each attitude was identical to all; the whole thing was entirely traditional, well rehearsed, and a matter of mild routine, down to the very deep-head inclinations, the lowering of eyes to the open books, and even the inflections of voice and the emphasis of the Reverend Mother as she began the Office with the words "*Ecce ancilla Domini,*" and was answered by a murmured response of "*Fiat mihi secundum verbum Tuum.*" This took place every day at the same time, toward the close of the afternoon, and had gone on since first the Convent of the Sisters of the Annunciation

was founded in this old house in the *Rue de Grenelle*, under the august patronage of the Duchess of Angoulême. To-day it was happening for the last time. No candles were lighted, no priest was vesting to go to the altar, no red-cassocked choir-boys made a note of brilliant color in the chapel. On the public side of the choir-screen no one was waiting for Benediction, which usually followed the afternoon office. The lay-sisters' benches were empty. These three nuns, the only occupants of the choir, were all that remained of the now-about-to-be-dissolved Order of the Annunciation.

It was a semi-cloistered Order, divided between contemplation and a certain limited amount of good works, very quietly performed. The foundress, *Anne Marie Desserteaux*, a native of Vendée, a holy woman who had been favored by visions, had prophesied, and even worked miracles (so it was reported), was mystically pursued by the scene of the Annunciation, and believed that the words of Our Lady, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord," pointed to an entire system of spiritual life, which was apprehended in the same sense and enthusiastically adopted by those fervent neophytes

who always flock to follow the footsteps of innovators. Perhaps they were also unconsciously influenced by their period, when the lily-bearing Angel-herald of the birth of the King of Israel was claimed as a symbol especially applicable to faithful Royalists of the Restoration. This symbol was still to be seen in the white stucco chapel, and the whole theory permeated the habits, ideas, and the very spirit of the Order. However this may be, the prosperity of *Les Annonciades*, or Sisters of the Annunciation, lasted no longer than that of the elder branch of the Bourbons. The great interior and exterior purity of life, and the spirit of meekness, patience, and submission, which were the very essence of Anne Marie's rule, still attracted some very innocent-minded girls, but the Order no longer spread. The Sisters had never tried to enrich the Order, and the decree of dispersion found them poor, neither able nor willing to defend themselves, and impressed with the general spirit of the Order, the *Fiat*, obedience to all that should be given them to be. Handmaids of the Lord, were they not pledged to accept all He ordained, even their dismissal? Thus, when the Commissioner announced that they were to disperse within a week, they did not even beg for further delay.

They did not afford themselves the luxury of taking legal action, nor seek consolation by a public protest. Sickly children who had come to learn the alphabet or the catechism in the lower room, young girls too delicate for factories, who had assembled daily to learn fine needlework (among other things the old Point d'Argentan lace, revived with great patience by one of the very old nuns), all these weakly derelicts dispersed quietly, with feeble lamentations, weeping as the poor do who fear their very tears may bear witness against them. The Order had no houses abroad and no means for traveling into exile. The Mother-house was about to close, as the Convents of Niort, Marseilles, and Lille had done, and the nuns, dispensed from their vows by the Cardinal Archbishop, were to return to their homes. The lay-sisters, mostly belonging to the poorer classes, had started first, the professed nuns having generously given up to them the larger part of the common possessions, and the trains of the day before and the morning had carried off the nuns who were going into the country or abroad. Only those whose families lived in Paris had remained behind with the Reverend Mother, faithful to her post to the last, the captain of the sinking ship. To the last she had

insisted on the scrupulous observance of the Rule. Nothing was altered on this last day of religious life, now drawing to a close.

When the evening office was ended, Mother Ste. Hélène repeated once more in the accustomed manner, "*Ecce ancilla Domini.*" But this time, as old Sister St. Louis and Sister St. Gabriel answered, the voice of the one trembled and the other burst into sobs. It was over. They rose. They were going forever. They would never re-enter the chapel, and nowhere else would they find the atmosphere they were leaving, with all the hopes and mystic dreams of their fervent youth, and the peaceful calm of their maturity; they were leaving the very home of their souls, with all its treasures of prayer and sacrifice bequeathed them by their predecessors. It was impossible to file out in the traditional manner. Sister St. Gabriel was weeping under her veil, and old Sister St. Louis raised hers, straining her dim eyes to take in and carry away all she saw for the last time—the great figure of Christ on the wall, so long seen from her stall, the familiar saints of the windows and pictures, and beyond the choir-screen the dark, empty nave, where she had seen vaguely and in the distance careless sight-seers, fashionable folk, and poor souls in peril,

whom she had recommended to the Divine Mercy and must now join. Mother Ste. Hélène had stopped midway in the sanctuary. She drew down the lamp still burning before the empty tabernacle, bent her head, and blew on it. The little flame went out. The last flicker of life was extinguished. The chapel contained only lifeless objects now; it was no more than a coffin, and the undertaker could come and seal it down to-morrow.

They stayed but a short time in the adjoining community-room. "My dear Sisters," said Mother Ste. Hélène, her calm, authoritative manner still unchanged, "we have barely time to take off our habits. Go. We will meet again here." Her quiet black eyes met the anxious gaze of Sister St. Gabriel. The latter wanted to ask a question, but did not like to venture, and, faithful to the end to her vow of obedience, went without a word to the cell she had occupied since her profession four years before. These four years had passed like a dream, or rather a sleep she had believed eternal, but from which she was now being abruptly awakened.

She closed the door, crossed herself mechanically, according to rule, and remained stand-

ing, her temples throbbing, and her heart overflowing with bitterness. Was it really true, really possible! She only now began to realize what was happening. When echoes of political trouble first began to disturb the nuns' peace, and gradually awoke them to the possibility of a catastrophe, she had refused to anticipate misfortune, and had repeated with perfect trust, "God will not allow it." She had clung to this even after the law had passed and been put into action. "God had allowed it," nevertheless, and now that she was convinced of this, the confused stupor which had bewildered her during the last week gave way to sharp and almost rebellious suffering. What, after immolating her whole life to the will of God, after so many secret struggles with herself and cruel pangs, was her sacrifice to be useless, and was the promised peace, at last attained, to be destroyed? Her anguish was in the thought that the Master had not fulfilled His word, and it was only by an effort of will that she forced herself to say: "God does all He does well! God knows better than I what is best for me!"

With a renewal of submission, and also to stop her thoughts, she began to undress. The white woolen wimple was first discarded, then

followed the head-band and inside veil, and lastly the habit. She took from off her narrow iron bedstead the garments hurriedly bought ready-made at the *Bon Marché*. She dressed awkwardly and under protest. As she drew in the large ill-fitting waist-band of the black cloth skirt and put on the skimpy jacket, she felt uncomfortable and ashamed, like some poor bird whose wings have been clipped. She seemed no longer her real self, but an eccentric and unclassable being. The long violet-and-white habit with its flowing sleeves lying across a chair looked as if Sister St. Gabriel had died, leaving her last mortal vesture behind her. In addition to everything else, she was pursued by the futile horror of appearing ridiculous. "I must not, I *will not* look absurd." She went to her simple dressing-table, which was supplied with necessary appliances. The first Sisters of the Annunciation had been recruited from among society women, who had influenced the habits of their convents. Some of the Orders founded by more unsophisticated nuns had been shocked at rather luxurious details, but the Annunciation nuns had retorted that the legend of St. Theresa passing through Purgatory, for having spent too much time in keeping her hands in good order, rested on tradition

only. Still the somewhat puerile scruples of convent life prevailed. The tiny mirror necessary for putting on the veil was hung too high to encourage any other form of vanity, and Sister St. Gabriel was obliged to take it off its nail and hold it in her hand, which she did with a certain amount of hesitation. She hesitated for a different reason before looking at herself. "What have I grown like?" A sudden rush of mingled feelings came over her as she was confronted by her image in the narrow glass. It was that of a stranger with a fleeting resemblance to some one remembered long since; it had the likeness of an elder sister to her junior. Certainly it was still the face of a young girl, or rather of a child-like woman. The face in the mirror showed her a slender oval, with rather pale cheeks and features whose severe though serene gravity contrasted with the naïve expression of large, limpid gray eyes, and still more sharply with a mass of pale gold hair. Fleecy tufts fell over the forehead and the temples, and curled round the ears, for her hair had always been rebellious and unmanageable, no matter how often it was cropped. Now it waved into the wildest curls, it blew about in the draught from the half-open window, and shone in the last rays of May sun-

shine, as unruly and free as if each lock were a released prisoner.

Sister St. Gabriel awkwardly fastened on the little black hat with its meager trimmings, and her toilette was complete. Then she packed up a few objects of devotion, a little linen, and her complete nun's costume, this slender outfit being what each departing sister took with her, and was just contained in the valise carefully provided by Mother Ste. Hélène. As she finished the bell rang for the last time. Mother Ste. Hélène had carefully calculated the hour, and had decided that the tension had lasted long enough. The hour of the final parting had come.

Twilight was settling over the community-room despite the light walls and large windows, and as she entered Sister St. Gabriel hesitated for a moment. By some natural confusion of thought, even her own metamorphosis had not prepared her for what was awaiting her, and in the half light she hardly recognized the two unfamiliar black figures. One was a tall, angular woman, whose head seemed too small for her thin, withered neck, the bird-like face with features further hardened by ink-black hair plastered down on each side of the forehead, and

looking ten years older than Mother Ste. Hélène. Her ascetic beauty and the abbess-look, which the nuns had delighted in, had disappeared; in its place all that remained was a certain distinctive originality, showing her aristocratic extraction even under her new disguise. As for Sister St. Louis, she seemed literally to have fallen to pieces; she had shrunk to nothing, and become a little old bent and withered country-woman, with hard, red cheekbones and untidy locks of gray hair sticking out from a crape bonnet. She smiled a pitiful smile of resignation under calamity and struggled to preserve her wonted cheerfulness, the great gift of simple souls. The three women exchanged glances. Suddenly an impulse seized them, and—to overcome the false position—the two nuns fell into each other's arms.

"Poor child, to have to face the world so young!" sighed the elder.

"To have to go back so late!" reflected the younger.

Mother Ste. Hélène interrupted them in her level voice, so used to being obeyed, and called, "Sister St. Gabriell!"

The young nun drew near, feeling uncomfortable at the sight of an envelope which her Superior took off the mantelpiece.

"My child, you do not yet know where you are going this evening. In not questioning me you showed a praiseworthy trust and confidence, and I told you nothing because I had nothing to tell, the letter to your mother having hitherto remained unanswered. I have only this moment received these few words."

Sister St. Gabriel, more and more disturbed, took from the Superior's hand a black-edged visiting card with a single line written under the name of *Madame Le Hallier*: "Mlle. Le Hallier is expected."

"Your mother's carriage is at the door," added the Superior, "and a cab has been fetched for Sister St. Louis. Now, my dear children——"

"Already!" both exclaimed.

Mother Ste. Hélène stood still, her hand resting on the black wooden table in the middle of the room. She kept silence for a moment, looking on the ground. Over her transfigured face passed an expression which had always been recognized in the quiet pause she made before speaking. It was as if her soul withdrew into itself before making a supreme effort. When she raised her head, her eyes burned with a mystic flame. "Yes, already. Between now and to-night we shall have much to go through,

and we must not waste our strength in useless conversation. One word before we part. This is no ordinary separation, but the breaking up of our community life, the life we chose in conformity with the will of God. One thing remains—one tie still binds us—our vocation still exists, for we obeyed the divine call and it is leading us farther, and perhaps higher than we could have hoped to be able to go.” In the twilight her eyes shone still more brightly, and her deep voice took a more solemn inflection. “We are nuns, and we remain nuns, for the gift we made of ourselves to God is one we can not take back. We are going to make it even more complete. Convent life was little to what awaits us—we have to live as nuns in the world, resisting every snare and hostile influence, and disregarding contempt; for we must not deceive ourselves, the world will always be our enemy in one sense or another; worldlings will never forgive us for going out from amongst them, and whenever an opportunity for reprisals occurs, it will be taken. Our vocation has no support to look to; every means will be taken to undermine and oppose it; we have only adversaries, even among our own people. Well, now is the time to prove that it is truly divine, to show that it is unshakable and super-

natural, to bear witness more than ever to the honor, the power, and the goodness of God. Our Rule, and the spirit of our Order, inherited from our Foundress and the holy women who preceded us here, all this we can carry with us. We must make it bear fruit and spread it in the world, returning good for evil, and reconquering the world for God, if necessary by patience, suffering, nay, by death itself. This is the task before us, and it will not exceed our strength because it is imposed upon us. This is the ordeal which we have to accept in love, since God gives it us to bear. Blessed be His Name for judging us worthy of it. Away with fear! Let us lift up our hearts: *Ecce ancilla Domini.*"

"Fiat mihi secundum verbum Tuum."

This time the answering voices did not falter, and both the troubled young nun and the crushed old sister felt their souls raised in equal fervor above all mundane anxiety.

"Mother, let us go back to the chapel once more!"

"The tabernacle is empty; we can pray as well here. Let us pray for our dispersed sisters, for those who are dead and whose holy memory we carry with us, but above all let us pray for those—you know whom I mean—for those who one day may need forgiveness."

Mother Ste. Hélène's thoughts had already left the house which was about to close its doors to her, and on rapid wing her mind was glancing over the menacing and unexplored world, leaving it behind to rise to realms of righteousness and glory. Her fervor abated, and practical common-sense once more took possession of her. "It is time to go. I have still to give you, my children, your share of the small amount of money we have been able to get together. What will become of the rest I have no idea. At any rate, this will help you over your difficulties for a time, for we shall not be spared temporal anxieties any more than spiritual ones." She said these words almost gaily, as she produced two carefully sealed little packets. Old Sister St. Louis took hers without protest, even tightening her fingers anxiously around it. Sister St. Gabriel made a gesture of refusal. "As I am to be received at home again, I shall want for nothing, Mother. May I—?" The Superior understood. "Yes; then take this also, Sister St. Louis. It happens fortunately, for your brother, I believe, has a family to support, has he not?"

Sister St. Louis made no objection, and things being so far settled, the three nuns, valise in hand, rose to go, leaving the doors open be-

hind them, ready for the invaders. "I shall have to try and make my legs less stiff; my brother lives on the fifth floor," remarked Sister St. Louis with a return of cheerfulness as she tottered down the large Louis XIV stone staircase with its magnificent banisters of wrought iron, relics of the bygone splendors of an old house in the *Faubourg*. Sister St. Gabriel, being close to the Superior, ventured at last on a question: "And you, Mother, are you going back to Belgium, to your family?" "My plans are still uncertain. I will let you know my address."

The newly installed concierge was waiting below. He could not resist staring at the strange apparitions, and Sister St. Gabriel felt herself blushing beneath his prying gaze. They went outside and crossed the courtyard, in which the professed nuns had hitherto been forbidden to walk; the "enclosure" no longer existed. The young nun felt as if a grating shut off the past, and a stone tomb was being opened for some unexpected return to life. "We are ghosts," she thought to herself, feeling, instead of the joy of resurrection, a bewildered, confused sensation of changed identity. By some association of ideas she recalled one of the last books she had read before entering the convent,

one of those half-fabulous, half-realistic stories of the Midi, originated or discovered by Alphonse Daudet. A village doctor, to make himself famous, offers to do more than merely cure a patient; he declares he can bring the dead to life. Every one follows him to the cemetery to be present at the miracle, but here they find themselves in a dilemma. Who shall be recalled to life? Some would find their places filled up, others their property divided, the wives of others had married, and finally no family will consent to the experiment. Still, there is one mother who wants her daughter back.

They were passing under the outer archway. One of the great doors opened gently. A gust of wind blew in from a different atmosphere, and Sister St. Gabriel looked out on the street, with its gas jets alight and people walking on the pavement opposite in front of a lighted shop. The veil which had hung for six years between her and all outer surroundings was being lifted. She beheld the world once more. This was the old Paris of her childhood. An arm was slipped in hers and she found herself outside. The police were waiting about, watching the departure with curious eyes. In front

of the gateway stood a yellow cab with lanterns alight, into which Mother Ste. Hélène pushed the bewildered, trembling Sister St. Louis.

"30A bis Rue d'Aumale." The door was shut and the coachman, after a leisurely glance at the secularized nuns, at last drove away. A dark blue private coupé now drew up. This time Mother Ste. Hélène kept in the background. "Go, my child!" The door of the blue coupé opened. Sister St. Gabriel was barely inside before she was clasped in a close embrace.

"Henriette!"

"Maman!"

The two horses of the coupé trotted briskly along, as if the animals themselves felt they ought to go quickly and carry off a recovered treasure.

Mother Ste. Hélène remained behind on the pavement watching the lamps disappear into the night. She stood there so long motionless that the police began to watch her more closely. Why did she not take a cab? Was she going to try and make her way surreptitiously back into the convent again? Suddenly the laïcized nun seemed to make up her mind. She drew herself to her full height, seized her valise abruptly in one hand, and started out into the

darkness. The woman who had governed hundreds of others, the daughter of Van Stilmont, late Cabinet Minister, was turned out into the streets in quest of a home.

CHAPTER II

AMONG THE LIVING

THE carriage proceeded rapidly up the Champs Elysées before either of its occupants had grown calm again. Henriette le Hallier, as she had become once more, was still sobbing in the arms which held her against a fast-beating heart, while her ears were filled with confused weeping murmurs and broken words and ejaculations. "My child, my little one, my own Henriette! I have you once again; I've got you back! All is forgotten, all is past! You know I always hoped it was not final! When I got your letter on Monday I didn't answer it. How could I? It was so cold, and such a contrast to all I feel myself! And then I had sworn that you shouldn't get a line from me as long as you remained there. But speak! Tell me you love me, and that I have really got you back!"

"Maman——!"

The word seemed to thrill with a kind of fear, an appeal for pity, and the maternal ear was quick to catch the inflection. This sufficed

to recall Madame Le Hallier to herself. The poor girl had been uprooted too suddenly from her habits. After her nature being so long repressed, such an outburst of purely human emotion must have frightened her. The mother must be careful and patient, and do nothing sudden. She unclasped her arms and made her voice gentle and soothing. "My little girl! My love shall console you for all you regret. You'll see! You were too much of a child, in old days, to understand my affection, and perhaps I was too young to show it properly, too emotional, too bound up in my own ideas, and I did not make enough allowance for your views. Now I am an old, old woman! The years of your absence have counted for double. You will be sad when you see the change in poor Maman! But don't take it to heart. If you feel you owe me any amends, you can easily and quickly make up for everything, only by letting me love you!" When Henriette knew she was to return home, she had only armed herself with courage and resignation. She remembered the terrible scenes that had taken place, the insults and the violence, which had made her vocation a perfect martyrdom, and had driven her to the final decision. As soon as she came of age she had gone into the convent without her mother's

consent, or even a farewell. She had not seen her since. Her letters had remained unanswered, and when her Superior had told her the week before to inform Mme. Le Hallier of the course of events and ask for shelter, she had expected a refusal, and had almost hoped for one, so vivid was her recollection of her terrible life at home. The welcome she received disarmed her. Natural affection stirred in the bottom of her heart and rose above all preconceived ideas and resolutions.

“Maman, I am so happy to see and kiss you once more! I am so delighted you aren’t angry with me any more. You must realize that I haven’t loved you less because I have learned to love God——”

“No, no; don’t explain— All is forgotten!”

At the sound of the familiar voice, Henriette, sitting by her mother, felt as if the later phases of her life had faded away, and she was once more a child, spoiled, petted, worshiped, her own will not yet in opposition to maternal despotism.

“Here we are,” resumed Mme. Le Hallier; “here is the little home I had prepared and kept ready for you.” The carriage drove up the Avenue d’Antin and turned into a charming courtyard filled with ferns and flowering

plants. Mme. Le Hallier signed to Henriette to get out. Orders had evidently been given that no one was to be about, and mother and daughter went in alone. They crossed the large, well-lit hall and went into the little Empire drawing-room. "You see, everything is in its old place," said Mme. Le Hallier. She went to the wall and turned on the electric light. The chandelier and wall brackets blazed. As Mme. Le Hallier gave a comprehensive glance at the pale, heavy-eyed girl, looking like some poor, shabby, awkward governess in her wretched clothes, she could not repress an exclamation. "What have they made of you! How they have disfigured you! Look at your hair! Your dear, pretty hair!" She took off Henriette's little black hat and feverishly fingered the thick clumps of cropped hair. "There it is; you've still got your lovely silky hair, my darling!" "Don't, don't, Maman," murmured Henriette. Madame Le Hallier controlled herself and only said, "Mine, as you see, has turned quite white." Henriette perceived this change and many others in her mother; she was all the more distressed because Mme. Le Hallier belonged to the type of woman who fights against the ravages of time.

Short and slender, with pretty little irregu-

lar features and the wonderful hair inherited by Henriette, Mme. Le Hallier had been, at the age of forty, bright, vivacious, fashionably dressed, and considered still a good-looking woman; even at fifty she had lost none of her vivacity, and certainly none of her obstinacy. After her husband's death she had skilfully managed and increased his large fortune, maintaining her social position, and expecting people and things to be subservient to her authority. She was the last to realize that a girl like Henriette, who seemed timid and gentle to excess, could attempt to shake off her yoke. At any rate, she did not allow herself to be defied without resistance, and Henriette's last recollection of her at the time of the final struggles had been an autocratic-looking widow, impetuous in movement, her face in all the bloom of health and energy beneath its crape weeds, showing the anger which speech was sometimes powerless to express. Now she was a faded, wrinkled old woman, with white hair, haggard cheeks, and heavy, dragging step. Her very gentleness, so foreign to her nature, seemed a depressing and alarming symptom. Grief as well as age had done its work, and Henriette's emotion was mingled with remorse. "Dearest Maman! I will do all I can to make

life happy for you. You shall have no more sorrow, and you shall know at last how I have always loved you through everything."

"I feel it now, dearest child—and I shall never suffer again, shall I? You will never leave me, promise me!"

"As long as God wills I should stay——"

"Till my death. Yes, I understand."

To avoid anything more definite, Mme. Le Hallier turned to other subjects, and began talking of the objects about them.

"You used to love this little room. Do you remember how we discovered this set of Empire furniture in the Rue Lafitte? Old Monsieur des Vernières always declared you looked like the Mme. Récamier of the Louvre on that little sofa. Look, there are all your little ornaments on the mantelpiece, just where you used to put them. I have always dusted and arranged them myself every morning. I never liked any one to come into this room. I never received here; I only came in to sit and cry. Now it all looks cheerful again. For the first time I have put flowers in your vases. Do you still love white lilac? That is beautiful; it is your own lilac from St. Germier, sent up by the gardener. Come and smell it."

Henriette pressed her weary face against the

sweet-smelling bunch of flowers, and suddenly before her rose the vision of the wide lawn at St. Germier, with its groups of ancient trees, that all visitors admired so in spring-time. She saw herself in the miniature virgin forest, her hands outstretched toward the softly swaying plumes of blossom, her hair catching in the sprays, as she laughingly shook off the rain of scented petals falling on her head. With the sweet scents of May-time other memories floated through her mind. Now she saw the Gothic chapel in the Rue de Grenelle. The nuns were kneeling before the high altar decorated with great branches of lilac; the freshest and most beautiful blooms that could be cut were brought there, that they might gradually fade and die, rendering up to God their little flower-souls in the shadow of the sanctuary. Mme. Le Hallier saw a sad expression pass over her daughter's features, and realized that she must beware of lilac. She abruptly changed the subject. "Let us come in to dinner, dearest. You must be so tired." The dining-room doors had been opened by a discreetly concealed manservant, and dinner was served as quietly and unobtrusively as possible. "None of the servants you knew are here," remarked Mme. Le Hallier casually. Thus all unpleasant associa-

tions and prying curiosity were kept away from this very uncomfortable transition period. The girl was touched by such a delicate attention. In order not to recall the immediate past, the two women kept to the safer ground of far-distant memories, and in this way the dinner and its after-interval passed smoothly. Mme. Le Hallier cut short the first ordeal. "You are worn out, my poor little soul; you must go to bed." "Am I to have the same room?" said Henriette, as they went up the first flight of stairs. "What other could you have?" The little house had been chosen and fitted up by Mme. Le Hallier when, on her husband's death, she had left her residence in the Avenue du Bois de Boulogne, which to her idea was much too decorative and elaborate. In the present one everything showed her passion for individuality and exclusiveness. There was only room for two, and all was arranged with a view to the comfort and pleasure of the inhabitants only. Henriette faltered and almost drew back from the threshold of the big room with its light and graceful furniture and its background of pale-colored silk. The rosewood bed with its artistically draped canopy drew her attention. What a contrast to the narrow iron bedstead in the whitewashed cell! Six years before she had

cheerfully exchanged the one for the other, and in reversing the order of things she felt such a strange secret pang that she could not define it even to herself. However, being dispensed from poverty with her other vows, she made no objections. Even the austere Mère Ste. Hélène had severely condemned this kind of scruple. "Obedience, my dear children, is often better than sacrifice!"

"I have sent the maid to bed. Let me help you undress," said Mme. Le Hallier, as if she were begging a favor. Her touch was arbitrary still, as she almost wrenched off her daughter the horrible black serge dress, which had something vaguely conventual about its stiff pleats. "Won't you put on this little thing?"

She had opened one of the drawers of the large American wardrobe, and taken down from its hook a light woolen morning gown. "That fits beautifully," she said, as Henriette put it on. "Luckily I had your measurements. You will find everything here that you will want for the first day or two." Mme. Le Hallier opened and shut various doors, showing glimpses of piles of underlinen tied up with ribbon, handboxes, and pretty trifles, which gave out a delicate perfume of scented sachets.

"You are too kind; you've thought of every-

thing," said Henriette, repressing her inclination to object. She must dress like other people, therefore why oppose her mother? Why not be grateful for such forethought and only permit herself the wish to be alone? Mme. Le Hallier could not realize this. After pacing about the bedroom and the almost equally large and more luxurious dressing-room with its white marble bath and colored majolica tiles, she came up to her daughter with the imploring air which sat so strangely on her. "Am I in your way? You want to say your prayers? Let us say them together and you will remind me of anything I may have forgotten. I am no free-thinker, and now that I no longer feel rebellious against God for taking you from me, the reconciliation must be complete."

She knelt down, and Henriette could not refuse to kneel beside her and repeat a formula of prayer. But spoken aloud, the words did not awake the accustomed feelings in her; they seemed no longer to rise straight from her heart to God. There was a third in the sacred intimacy. She felt it deeply, but dared not complain. This was the beginning of the new path traced out for her by Mère Ste. Hélène, the apostolate which was to replace contemplation.

"If I prayed inattentively, my mother at any rate did not," she said to herself, looking at Mme. Le Hallier's wet eyes, as both rose from their knees. Her mother only consented to leave her when in bed, and then she did not leave behind her the peace Henriette was sighing for.

The daughter had been overdone with emotion during the last few days, and now a nervous reaction set in. All passed in tumult through her brain: the arrival of a commissary one morning at the convent, the terrified face of the portress coming to announce him, the bewildered nuns hurrying hither and thither while the Superior and her assistants took council together, the agonized suspense until they all met in the Community-room, where Mère Ste. Hélène slowly and carefully broke the dreadful news. . . . They were to go. But the house was authorized! No matter! They were to go all the same! Why? No one understood clearly, because they were face to face with what honest folk never can understand, the triumph of evil. Still, they were in their own house! That, it appeared, had nothing to do with the case. The nuns had ceased to be citizens or property owners; they no longer ranked even as women. They could no longer

expect justice, consideration, or pity. What was to become of them? The men who had made the law did not trouble to inquire. And the infirm? There were two helpless inmates of the Rue de Grenelle. . . . And octogenarians? There were two of them also. They were turned out with the others, to find shelter where best they could. Mère Ste. Hélène had obtained admission for the latter in a religious establishment, whence doubtless they would be expelled again by the first vehicle that passed. They had left before any of the others, and Henriette could still hear the first signal for the general exodus, in the wailing of old Sister St. Antoine, the oldest nun in the house. She was almost in her second childhood and had been carried out by force, clutching at the walls and begging the same grace of God as He had sent to Sister Ste. Anne, her last companion in the novitiate, who had died in a fit the month before at Niort on the day the seals were affixed on her convent. On her lace-trimmed pillow Henriette's head was beginning to burn, as faces and figures of her convent life passed before her. She saw peaceful cloistered faces to which the sudden catastrophe had called back all their human passions, haggard faces bathed in long-forgotten tears, bewildered, wild faces,

eyes blazing with excitement, and mouths calling out for miracles, others contractedly sobbing, others bitterly, tightly closed. She saw the nun who wanted the other sisters to rise in revolt, and stand by their guns, martyrs if need be, on the convent steps; she heard another repeat that it was all a bad dream, just a crucial moment to get through, and that in three months the Government would have fallen and the house be opened again; she saw the nuns who collapsed beneath their grief, and the sublime creatures who rose above it. But the grief of all, each in her different degree, was made up of the same two elements—the break-up of their spiritual life and anxiety for their temporal future. The sisters all felt for each other, little animosities melted away, and all could mutually console and exhort each other more or less. One nun alone was outside this general fusion, and Henriette beheld her standing out more clearly than any—Sister Ste. Edwige, a little Polish girl, who had entered at eighteen, and edified every one in the novitiate by her extraordinary fervor. She had had to be restrained from excess in penances, and it was whispered that Our Lady had appeared to her. Almost immediately after her final vows this supernatural condition had given place to a

strange languid melancholy; she took no interest in anything, and would weep by the hour together for no reason that any one could discover. Directly the Cardinal's letter arrived annulling the vows, she had altered again. She was quite unmoved by the general distress and seemed wrapt up in her own thoughts, silent, but with a strange light in her eyes.

Just before leaving she smiled mysteriously at Sister St. Gabriel and said: "We can take up our lives afresh!"

Henriette le Hallier grew more and more restless. The pretty, graceful, rather feline Pole, with her over-expressive eyes, seemed too like a fallen angel; and the Slavonic accent had given a peculiar emphasis to her words. "We can take up our lives afresh." No we can not. Mère Ste. Hélène has told us we can not. . . . What was happening to Mère Ste. Hélène and to poor Sister St. Louis? It was cowardly to leave them to their troubles. What form was that trouble taking to-night? Sad, fateful visions passed before Henriette's eyes. In her fright she cried out and awoke.

At the same moment the light was turned on; Mme. Le Hallier had come in and was standing beside the bed. "I heard you. You are upset. Drink this."

Henriette mechanically swallowed the contents of the glass held to her lips, murmured a word of thanks, and fell back, leaving her hand in that of her mother. The room grew dark again and she fell asleep, peacefully this time, soothed as a little child by the maternal influence and "suggestion" which was dominating her weakness. She had determined to go to Mass next morning, but it was impossible. All the accumulation of mental and physical fatigue made itself felt at last, and it was mid-day before she could leave her bed. In the loose, comfortable, white morning gown, which reminded her a little of her habit, she took a few turns around the rooms and went onto the little porch to look at a corner of the garden where gay flower-beds had blossomed in the spring sunshine. Afterward she went back into the big drawing-room to look once more at her father's picture. It was one of those splendid, lifelike portraits which both attract and sadden us when we have lost the living original. The gentle, pensive eyes, so like her own, seemed to call her across the threshold, and she felt as if the beloved dead man had been waiting for her. Here everything was unchanged, as in the other rooms. Life seemed to have stood still in her absence; her departure had

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left a gap impossible to fill, and this thought caused her an involuntary and purely human feeling of elation. After all, what did the world's opinion signify, if she was to find her place by the family hearth, her own duties and a special work which she alone could do? Life was possible on earth for those who returned from the grave, and Daudet's psychology was false. The daughter of the legend could have been raised and given back to her mother without disturbing any one on earth! She sat down by her own grand piano. "You used to play so well," murmured Mme. Le Hallier. She had played the organ at the convent, and her fingers, which had not grown stiff, placed themselves on the keys with a thrill of pleasure. Fragments of classical music, always her favorite, came back to her, and she rose to turn over the pile of music-books in their old place on the end of the piano. But instead of the familiar pages of Beethoven, Bach, or Schumann, she found new pieces, and airs with names which slightly startled her. "Who sings these?" she asked.

Mme. Le Hallier's back was turned and she did not hear. Henriette was now standing before a needlework frame in the window recess, and lifting the tissue paper which covered a

pattern worked in very fine tapestry-stitch, "Are you doing this pretty work, Maman?" she asked.

"No. My eyes aren't strong enough for such fine stitches." Mme. Le Hallier spoke hoarsely as if some difficult avowal was choking her. But it could not be deferred. "I shall have to tell you, Henriette!—I am not alone here. I hadn't the courage to stay in this empty house alone, with no reasonable hope of ever getting you back. So to distract my thoughts, and to pretend to the world that I was resigned, I took your cousin Paula to live with me—and as your uncle Marigny is still at Madagascar, I can't send her back yet. She has gone to Versailles to stay with friends for two days. Will you mind very much if she comes back to-morrow?"

CHAPTER III

THE CABINET MINISTER'S DAUGHTER

MONSIEUR COLIN DE COCHEVAL had been Justice of the Peace for a northern department till a time-serving Republican government had made him retire; he had represented the "*Centre Droit*" in Parliament till his constituents had refused to re-elect him, and he now found, in the editorship of the great Catholic newspaper, *L'Etendard*, a profitable use for his time, talents, and devotion to the good cause. As no man is perfect here below, he felt great pleasure in his own importance, and in the official habits he was still able to retain. Three times a week at ordinary times, and almost every day since *L'Etendard*, on the initiative of its editor, had undertaken the delicate task of helping the dispersed Congregations, did Monsieur Colin de Cocheval arrive at the office of the *Vieux Colombier* on the stroke of two. He got out of his carriage, a dispatch-box stuffed with papers under his arm, and by the time he had reached his private room he felt that he was indeed a personality to

be reckoned with. On the ground floor the concierge touched his cap, and all the way up he was met by a succession of clerks, reporters, odd men of all sorts, begging letter-writers, and great personages waiting to get a word with him. At last he was able to put his hat on a chair, his stick in a corner, his dispatch-box on his desk, and to sit down with a sigh of relief, which was always part of the programme.

Of course he was not in the least tired, really. On the contrary, as he took in at a glance the pile of letters and papers awaiting him, his fine open face, framed in its majestic white beard, beamed all over, in spite of his second regulation sigh of dismay. "One doesn't know where to begin!"

This morning he cut short the usual ritual. A strip of blue paper caught his eye, and he turned quickly to the young secretary, who was waiting for orders. "Show this lady in."

The lady must have been a visitor of some importance, for on her entry M. Colin de Cocheval not only arose from his seat and bowed, but took a step or two toward her and pulled up an armchair.

"I am sorry, Madame, that you should have troubled to come yourself. I intended calling on you."

"Your time is more valuable than mine, Monsieur. Besides, I felt I must come and thank you."

"Not at all, Madame—I am quite at your disposal, but unfortunately I am not able to be of much use."

M. Colin de Cocheval had reseated himself, and the first fervor of his politeness was beginning to subside. "In fact, I have no definite result to tell you of," he concluded.

"Oh! then the matter you mentioned in your letter——?"

"Is practically settled, certainly— But there are some points which can only be arranged in a personal interview—I am sorry I did not make this clearer."

If the excellent M. Colin de Cocheval had not made things clearer, it was because he himself wished to leave ground for retreat; he was apt sometimes to be carried away and to make a muddle of his arrangements. He had been asked for a woman of mature age to fill a difficult post in a family. She must be thoroughly well bred, and a person of sound judgment. No one answered better to this description than the late Superior of the Annunciation, Mme. Van Stilmont. She had written him such a charming letter, and her ecclesiastical refer-

ences were so irreproachable, that he described her enthusiastically to the Druault family, who were fascinated on the spot. Now he felt slightly disenchanted, and reflected that their fascination might also abate when they came to see in what outward form so much virtue, wisdom; and incontestable aristocracy was enshrined.

As he bent over his desk he took a sidelong glance at the tall, haggard, shabby woman. She looked eccentric and out of the ordinary, with her wrinkled throat exposed by the ill-fitting collar of her dress, her waxy, unwholesome complexion, and her fiery eyes under the black hair plastered down each side of her forehead. "These poor nuns all look alike," he said to himself by way of encouragement, "when they have to leave off their caps and veils. The Druaults must know what to expect. The other day I helped one into a tram-car and she didn't even know how to get in! This one doesn't look stupid in that way, and she will gradually improve. Her father was a Cabinet Minister. Her feet are quite small. She is a most distinguished woman. I shall keep harping on that if they make difficulties——" He began to smile benevolently again and to make the best of things. "I did not take upon

myself to promise anything in a hurry, Madame. You are anxiously expected, but I shall not send the decisive telegram until I have thoroughly explained the circumstances to you, so that you are prepared for everything."

"I don't know how to thank you for your great kindness."

M. Colin de Cocheval leaned forward on his desk to make a long and serious speech.

"Well, this is how things stand. There would be three children to educate: that is the kind of work you prefer, is it not? In this case, I fear, there may be some difficulties in the way. Between ourselves, from what I have seen of the mother, the little Druaults must have been rather neglected——"

"I shall be all the more useful——"

"And—I must also tell you that the children are not the only ones whose education must have been rather perfunctory. The parents make me rather anxious, especially from your point of view. They are perfectly respectable, and have excellent views—but theories and manners don't always go together——do you understand?"

"Have they been in trade?" asked Mme. Van Stilmont gently.

"Yes; the parents had a straw-hat factory at

Aubervilliers, where they made their fortune, but they were originally common working people, I am told. As for Mme. Druault, every one knows that her mother was a celebrated Rue de la Paix dressmaker, Mme. Rose or Blanche—I forget the name at this moment—I am telling you all this now, as you will have to know it sooner or later, and you may find it out in some unpleasant way, perhaps! The millions they have inherited on both sides have turned their heads a little, of course. They want to get on in society, which so far has shown them the cold shoulder, and they live in a very expensive style. I hear the husband and wife don't get on very well together. This is the information, and even the gossip, which I thought it my duty to put before you."

"Well, but Monsieur, you do not mean to imply that there is any scandal going on in the house, anything to compromise the dignity of the religious habit I have had to put aside?"

M. Colin de Cocheval smiled a blasé smile. "Nothing more, Madame, than you would find in two-thirds, not to say nine-tenths, of the modern household. It is no use deceiving yourself. Innocence, peace, and perfect security are things you have left behind you. You will not find them anywhere in the world as it is

to-day." The worthy M. Colin de Cocheval was proceeding to initiate the Superior, now become a novice, in his own experiences when she cut him short: "Well, Monsieur, is it your opinion that I should accept?"

"As far as propriety goes, certainly. Your own personal susceptibility may shrink from——"

"I wrung the neck of all feelings of sensitiveness when I entered the convent, Monsieur, and I certainly had to when I came out."

Madame Van Stilmont uttered these last words with so much simple dignity that Monsieur de Cocheval could not help being impressed.

"She is a real *grande dame*," he said to himself.

"There is one more point, Madame," he resumed, trying to cover his embarrassment; "and that is the question of salary, which I must apologize for mentioning. What they offer is quite inadequate, on the pretext that Madame Druault senior pays it, and that she is very mean—has so many claims—" At last he blurted out in a shamefaced sort of way, "Eighty francs a month. I could not get them up to the hundred."

"That will be quite enough for me, Monsieur.

They must not make me break my vow of poverty." There was a faint gleam of satire in the Superior's grave and resigned smile, and M. Colin de Cocheval once more reflected what a *grande dame* she was. "Then I can telegraph that you will start to-morrow for Rheims," he observed aloud.

"To-morrow? Certainly. At what time?"

M. Colin de Cocheval turned over the leaves of a timetable. "At 9.30. That is the most convenient train." He scribbled a few lines and called to his secretary. "This is to go immediately. Can I have the honor of doing anything more for you, Madame?"

She took her shabby black sunshade from the side of her chair (it looked like her, with its long black stick and thin cover), and walked toward the door, which M. Colin de Cocheval respectfully opened. "I must thank you, Monsieur, for your tact and kindness. I have only prayers to offer you in return."

"That is a great deal, coming from you, Madame." He accompanied her to the foot of the stairs, and watched the slim black figure disappear through the gateway. "Perhaps I have earned the prayers of a saint," he said to himself, worldly considerations giving way before one of the waves of religious feeling which

advancing age brought oftener and oftener to the excellent man. "At any rate they are the prayers of the persecuted, and that is almost as good!"

Mme. Van Stilmont dragged herself wearily along the streets. In her cloistered life she had grown unaccustomed to walking, and she was giddy with the voices of the bustling crowd which had surrounded her during the fortnight since she was cast adrift in the heart of Paris. If she could have found it in her heart to rejoice at anything, it would have been at the thought that the next day she would be gone, and would have no cares upon her beyond providing for her own future. She was going to drop her double load of enforced idleness and temporal anxiety.

"God is sending me to work once more in His vineyard," she reflected, in the mystic language she no longer dared to use to others, because of its great contrast to the ideas and expressions of those about her, "and it matters not how hard the ground is to dig." The Ladies' Home in which she had taken refuge was kept by a pious old maid, and everything in it jarred against Mère Ste. Hélène. The piety of the place was narrow and materialistic, it clashed with her high ideals; and she was sur-

rounded by prying curiosity and officious sympathy. A laïcized nun! The real thing! It was most interesting, and the inmates were always asking her to "tell them about it." She was watched and followed about; all sorts of advances and approaches were made to her. "I will go and see Sister St. Louis to-day," she said to herself with a wild longing for the sight of one of her own nuns, for some one to whom she was not an anomaly and with whom she need not keep up appearances. During the first few days of separation she had been afraid of stirring up family jealousy and disturbing the beginnings of a new life by visiting her former companions, and she still intended keeping away from Henriette le Hallier. Henriette had her mother, but Mère Ste. Hélène could not leave Paris till she knew what was going to become of old Sister St. Louis.

"Is Rue d'Aumale far?" She was obliged to ask her way, but she preferred finding it step by step to mingling with the crowds who besieged the omnibus offices¹ or to the fruitless struggle to get into the vehicle, which left her standing on the pavement, the center of staring eyes. The long, offensive stares she met on all

¹In Paris the omnibus companies issue tickets which must be taken before getting into the vehicle.—TRANSLATOR'S NOTE.

sides were one of her tortures, and in her distress she would mechanically raise her hand for the missing veil. For some time she had left the quiet *Rive Gauche* behind her, and was growing more and more bewildered.

It was one of those afternoons when June anticipates the dog-days, and the warm, gentle airs of spring are choked off by the violent heat of premature summer. The fiery sun was streaming down over squares and streets, dust hung in the air, areas and courtyards exhaled faint smells, and the contents of shop windows seemed to fade as they lay. Cafés were overflowing with straw-hatted customers. In the squares children were running about and buzzing like flies before a thunderstorm. Women in cotton blouses were lolling back exhausted in their chairs, others were trying to get a breath of air at their shop doors, and couples were swinging along arm-in-arm in rather a demoralized condition, as if the sun had gone to their heads. There was oppression as well as intoxication in the heavy air. Well-dressed people drove by in carriages, poor wretches with purple, apoplectic faces seemed ready to drop down with sunstroke, cab-horses, glistening with sweat, hung their heavy heads.

"God is very merciful in sending me to live

in the country," reflected Mme. Van Stilmont, as the vision rose before her of blue sky, green trees, and restful solitudes, where some of the lost peace of the cloister might make itself felt once more. "I wish that Sister St. Louis could say the same."

She dragged herself painfully along the Rue des Martyrs, and with every step she took the neighborhood struck her as more and more uncongenial. At last she turned into the Rue d'Aumale and stopped before No. 30 A, a narrow old house divided up into shops. The open door of a wine merchant's showed three cabmen drinking. Next door the window of a stationer and bookseller exhibited cheap notepaper, second-hand volumes, and colored postcards representing monuments, landscapes, celebrities and persons in various national costumes taken by a bad photographer and villainously tinted in color. The shop bore the name of Charteron, Bookseller. Sœur St. Louis' brother was called Pierre Charteron. This was the right house. Mme. Van Stilmont went in, causing a tinkling bell to ring, and rousing the proprietress, a woman with a swollen, pasty face and frizzled black hair, who was half asleep in the cashier's desk.

"Mademoiselle Charteron?"

Before she had time to answer Mme. Van Stilmont, a young girl rushed out of the back shop. She was evidently the daughter, and was also pale and dark-haired, but she seemed more lively than the mother, was better dressed, and tossed her head as she looked the late Superior of the Annunciation up and down. She was evidently longing to giggle, and held a book before her mouth as she remarked: "I suppose you have come to see my aunt. Well, you must go up to her; she can't come down because of her rheumatism. The staircase is at the end of the court, along here."

She led Mme. Van Stilmont through the narrow little den which did duty for a back shop. It opened into the courtyard leading to the living rooms on the fifth floor. "Go up and ring at the door on the left. Aunt will let you in," explained the girl, and with that she left the visitor to her fate. There could be no doubt that Sister St. Louis must find it difficult to get down, and still more to climb up, the flight of stairs. It was a regular break-neck affair, and as Mme. Van Stilmont clung to the banisters and felt the concentrated atmosphere of mysterious and wicked surroundings, the heavy, vitiated air turned her sick and faint. On the fifth floor she rang. After a moment's delay

the door was opened, first timidly and then thrown wide, and she heard a stifled exclamation. "Oh, mon Dieu! What joy to see you!"

Sister St. Louis was more bent and shrunken than ever; she kept raising her hands and exclaiming, "What joy to see you!" as if she could hardly believe her eyes. Then, suddenly frightened, she shut the door and whispered, "My nephew is there. Hush! Come this way—" Without further words she drew her silent companion along the corridor, and it was only when the key was safely turned in Sister St. Louis' own room that they could both speak.

"Mother!"

"Sister!"

At the sound of the words which no one had uttered since their separation, old feelings and sorrows returned, the present was forgotten, and Sister St. Louis, on her knees, her head in her Superior's lap, sobbed like a child. Mme. Van Stilmont laid a mother's hand on the poor gray head that would know no more protection in this world. Then Sister St. Louis poured out all her troubles as in old convent days. "Oh, Mother! How I have missed you! I didn't know what to do alone, without you to advise me. How was I to guide myself? Mon

Dieu! I that am more ignorant than the youngest and too old to learn. I found that out as soon as I had left you and the dear convent. I wasn't much good there; here I am absolutely useless. I can't say that they received me unkindly; on the contrary, they did their best. My brother shed tears when he saw me again, and they have really put themselves out to make room for me. I'm not uncomfortable here; at least it's quiet, but if only it weren't so dark!" She pointed to the narrow window looking on to a backyard, or rather a deep well, from which came a whiff of damp air laden with all the dirt from the dingy old walls. Above these walls rose more roofs, of all shapes, dented in and pierced in every direction by garret windows, and above these again were chimney-pots, so that nothing could be seen but the barest strip of blue sky. "And then they talk of being shut up in convents," said Sister St. Louis, with a glimmer of her old cheerfulness. She got up to do the honors of her wretched home. "The cage isn't pretty, is it? Never mind; it suits the bird. Everything is clean and tidy, that is the great thing." The wretched common furniture shone, and the fire-irons glittered, the old wooden planks of the floor had been scrubbed over and over again,

the white bed-curtains and counterpane were of the dazzling white only seen in convent-washed linen.

"This is best of all," said Sister St. Louis, turning around. On a little table was arranged a *Mois de Marie* book in the favorite edition for children, and behind it stood the reproduction of Fra Angelico's "Annunciation," which each nun had taken away from the Rue de Grenelle. In the center stood a statue of Our Lady of Lourdes in her white dress and blue sash, flanked on either side by a candlestick and a pink glass vase holding a big bouquet.

"Guess who sent me those lovely flowers, Mother."

"Sister St. Gabriel."

"You know everything!" exclaimed Sister St. Louis in amazement. "Yes, the poor little thing brought them yesterday; she would have come sooner, only she has been ill. But she seems quite well now, and was so kind! She was just the same as ever, even more affectionate and really like a sister. I was so pleased to see her that it upset me and I cried like a perfect idiot. I could hardly get out a word. Besides, her mother was with her."

"Mme. Le Hallier came up here?"

"I was very much surprised. Perhaps she

wanted to show what good terms she was on with her daughter; she certainly seems very kind and affectionate to her, and not at all anxious to get her away from us; for she was the first to say we should meet again when they come back from the country. They were to leave Paris yesterday for a château in the Seine et Marne district, and it gave me a pang to remember I had to stay here alone, away from every one. I felt as if I were on a desert island."

"But you have your relations."

"Yes, I know, and I have always been fond of them. They used to write to me, and come to see me at the convent, Mother, you remember? But still, now we have grown apart and have each lived our own life for forty years, it feels funny to be together again. My only real relations and the only family where I could ever be happy are the Sisters and you. And although Sister St. Gabriel is being petted and spoiled by her mother, she feels just the same as I do. She had tears in her eyes when she asked after you— We were afraid you had gone back to Belgium. You won't go, will you, Mother? 'You won't forsake us altogether?'"

"No, Sister dear, I am not going back to Belgium, but still I can not be as near you as I should like to be. I am going to-morrow into

a family who have been good enough to engage me as a governess——”

“Engage *you*—Mother!”

Sister St. Louis seemed turned to stone. After a few moments she threw herself once more weeping at her Superior's feet. The gentle sobs of their first meeting had given way to a torrent of despair. “Oh, Mother, it isn't possible that you can go among strangers! It's hard enough to go back into one's own family. I see now how miserably selfish I was to complain. Am I not leading the life I was originally meant for? What am I but a peasant's daughter, although my god-mother did have me brought up in a convent, where I found my vocation? Our Order was willing to take me in, but what more natural than that I should return to my proper state of life, as I had to leave my dear convent? But I can't resign myself to the idea of your working and earning your own living. Oh, Mother! I *can't* realize it! Alas for the wretches who have made such a thing possible! They are worse than the '93 men, who pulled down our churches and guillotined our nuns. These can only drag down and profane what they touch. They put the Blessed Sacrament under arrest, and instead of making a woman like you a martyr on

the spot, which at least would be a fitting end for your vocation, they try to upset your whole scheme of existence. They have torn you away from the place where God put you, because you could do more good there than anywhere else. You were so helpful to those you had under you——”

“Perhaps it is time I did some good to my own soul by obeying others,” said the Superior, with the same smile which had made M. de Cocheval think her “*si grande dame*.” It also impressed Sister St. Louis in some way she did not understand, and she fell silent.

“Pray for me, that is all I ask,” resumed Mme. Van Stilmont, “and let us not waste the short time we have to spend together. Sit there, my dear daughter, and tell me all you were going to. Don’t hesitate to explain all your trouble and anxiety.”

“Well, Mother, what worries me most is to see how Almighty God is forgotten here.”

With bent head and hands crossed in her lap, Sister St. Louis slowly and carefully pondered her words before speaking. “I have often thought of what you used to say about its being so easy to serve God in the Convent, compared to the difficulties we should find in the world. In the fortnight I have been here I have felt

more troubled in mind than in the forty years of my life as a nun. Always something to disturb and irritate me, always something to take up my time or my thoughts, to come between me and God! Of course these poor creatures, living in such slavery to the world, must forget Him! What is the use of telling them about our rules, when they are a law to themselves? Business is all that is thought of here, and trade is bad just now. Bills and I. O. U.'s are always arriving, and no money coming in to meet them; then come family quarrels and discussions, and mutual reproaches, and in addition to the struggle to make a living, they each have private troubles and temptations, which are strongest when the future looks bad. My sister-in-law is quite disheartened. She has bad health and no energy of character; when she ought to exert herself, she only complains and neglects everything. Then of course my brother gets furious! He takes himself off—and unluckily that horrible wineshop next door is always open! Mon Dieu! Such a good sort, and such a hard worker, to come to that! The children's temptation is nearer home—bad, vile books!"

The old nun blushed and held down her head. "I just caught sight of the titles—that

was quite enough for me—I wish I dare take them up with the tongs and burn them all—I never go into the shop—but imagine my little niece spending all her days there, reading all those awful things at eighteen! I can see that she is remembering them when she sits silent with a bemused look in her eyes, just like her father when he comes home late at night. They are both being poisoned, but what she swallows is the more dangerous.”

“And what of your nephew?” inquired Mme. Van Stilmont, hoping to hear something more encouraging. But the poor nun looked sadder than ever.

“He is an intelligent, steady lad, and works almost too hard. His success at school has almost turned his head. He is reading for some examination or other, although he is in a bank; and as soon as he has a minute he hurries back here to shut himself up with his books. He never goes for a walk or opens his lips to any one. We only see him at meals, and then he never speaks to any one, which is just as well, considering his views! He is a freethinker with no belief in any duties or principles whatever; the poor boy doesn’t even believe in the immortality of the soul; God forgive him!”

Mme. Van Stilmont laid her hand on the

trembling folded hands. "Perhaps God will forgive him for your sake, Sister. That is what you must pray for."

"Yes, I had thought of that, but I am weak, too!"

The old Sister hung her head.

"—I let myself get over-anxious about temporal concerns and alarmed for the future, instead of leaving it all in God's hands. When I see them all so taken up with money, and making so light of duty and principle, I am frightened— They are kind to me, as I told you, but I am still self-supporting, and thanks to your generosity and Sister St. Gabriel's present, I can pay them a little for my board, and that helps them. I hope I shall be able to keep it up. We ought to get something when the general liquidation of convent property is over. But supposing the Government waits too long or refuses to give anything back? —They are quite capable of it—or if I fall ill? I wake up in the middle of the night with thoughts like these. A wave of misery comes over me, and I ask myself how any one could have the right or the heart to turn a poor old woman like me into the street, without stopping to remember that among the items of convent property stolen was my own little dowry from

home, without caring whether or not they had separated me from people who would take care of me to my last hour, and above all, without giving me any other provision instead of all this. And, then, I can't help calling the people thieves who have so ill-treated me, and I wonder God leaves me still in the world. Prayer does not comfort me. Mother, what must I do, or think, to recover my peace of mind?"

"Sister St. Louis, what did you expect when you became a nun?"

This searching question abashed the poor Sister; she left Mme. Van Stilmont to answer herself.

"You wished to suffer for God, to work for others, and to obtain mercy for them. Those were the essentials of your vocation, and that foundation still remains to you; therefore, my dear child, you have nothing to regret; in fact, to be a true nun you should rejoice that you are utterly despoiled of everything, suffering to the utmost, and working in a really efficacious way."

"But my grief is that I can do nothing for them. If only I could!"

"You can always love them, and if you loved them really in God and entirely forgot yourself, you would gain them at last, or at any rate

set them an example. Perhaps it is for the sake of setting this example that God sent us into the world."

Mme. Van Stilmont was speaking not only to her hearer, but was exhorting herself in all the ardor of her faith, and her words were all the more impressive.

"Yes, I will, I will!" exclaimed Sister St. Louis. "How could I so forget my duty! But you have shown me the right path, Mother, and I will try to be brave—as brave as you."

"Well, having made these good resolutions, we must part, my dear child," said Mme. Van Stilmont, rising. After great spiritual flights she often came straight down to most trivial details.

"And I can give you a small proof now," she proceeded, "of the divine protection which you had almost begun to doubt." She held out three notes of a hundred francs¹ each, remarking: "After making up my accounts, I find this is your share."

"Oh, Mother, I can't accept it! I have taken too much already; this belongs to you."

"It is your share," repeated the Superior; "I insist on your taking it."

The old nun stopped short. Had not even

¹ Twenty dollars.

M. Colin de Cocheval himself hesitated to speak of money to Mme. Van Stilmont? She took the notes, saying, "Well, I shall put them by."

"Very well, keep them as long as possible." Mme. Van Stilmont refused to be escorted downstairs, and as she picked her way she thanked God for allowing her to bestow a two-fold alms.

"I gave her a little encouragement, and the money will be like oil on troubled waters; it will keep them smooth for a time."

At the foot of the stairs she took the opportunity of being alone to take out her purse and count its contents in the half-light from the door. Allowing for some indispensable purchases and the price of her ticket, she would only possess fifty francs in the world on her arrival at the Druaults.

"I am the poorest of us all. I am more truly poor than I was in the convent," she said to herself, a smile of beatitude spreading over her stern features. In going out she had to cross the shop, where Mme. Charteron was still nodding over her desk. Customers had not aroused her, and the only one there, a youth with a fair mustache, was careful to whisper as he turned over magazines with Mlle. Charteron. A faint flush stained the girl's white cheeks as she an-

swered in the same subdued key. Both stopped speaking as Mme. Van Stilmont appeared, and waited till she had closed the shop door. "So that's another of them, come to see your aunt, eh?" asked the young man with a sly wink.

"Yes, indeed. I suppose they think one's not enough at a time in a house. Look here, Monsieur Alfred, those women, I—" Her voice rose shriller and more piercing, and her pale cheeks flamed. The girl's whole anemic, wizened little body was shaken with fury. The man was astounded. "I loathe them—there!"

"But why do they get on your nerves so, Mademoiselle? What harm have they done to you?"

"I don't know anything about that; I only know I hate them."

CHAPTER IV

THE TRAP

“**N**O letters to be written before post-time, Auntie?”

“Yes, we must answer that invitation.”

Paula Marigny glanced at the card Mme. Le Hallier passed to her, and looked slightly annoyed.

“Oh! the Arnouvilles’ wonderful dinner-party. Of course we refuse——”

She laughed dryly as she went into the next room, where the writing-table was.

“I have got into the habit of letting her write my letters,” said Mme. Le Hallier in a low voice. She remained behind with her daughter.

“She is a great help to you,” remarked Henriette.

“Oh, now——!” and Mme. Le Hallier looked significantly at Henriette. Through the open door Paula’s pen could be heard scratching along the paper. The note was soon written. In a minute or two the young girl came back, carrying it. “I must post it. It’s time,” she said hurriedly, crossing the library, her figure looking particularly upright.

Henriette rose and took up her sunshade.
"I'll go with you."

"Just as you like——"

"Yes, go and get a little air and sunshine,"
urged Mme. Le Hallier.

Through the library window she watched her daughter and Paula as they went down into the garden and across the avenue of the park, and her face lost its look of anxiety.

"Things are looking better, certainly," she said to herself with a sigh. "I thought it would be easier in the country than in Paris." During the month they had spent at St. Germer, Henriette had ended by growing a little more acclimatized. The seclusion recalled, in a sense, the peace of the cloister, and she was insensibly yielding to the influence of the pleasant surroundings, which in this case were exceptional. Paris was near, but the proximity of a great city only added to the charm of Nature in her blossoming time. The vast park enclosed between high walls, shut in by clumps of trees which almost blotted out the sky, grassy slopes, mysterious haunts of shade, and a very world of verdure and flowers—all this made up a scene where the outer life of the world could easily be forgotten. All was simple, and full of domestic atmosphere. The house itself, a

Louis XV structure, had no pretensions to being a château. It was one of those semi-aristocratic, semi-bourgeois homes where parliamentary deputies of their day had been wont to take their ease amidst rustic scenery, and the descendants of Councilor Marigny of the eighteenth century had scrupulously respected the character of the place. Even Mme. Le Hallier, with her great fortune, had refrained from making any alterations when, after her marriage, she had been able to buy back St. Germier from her brother, who was on the verge of ruin. Paula, thus disinherited before her birth, which ought to have taken place at St. Germier, was only able to come occasionally, and in secret, as it were, during intervals when her relations were on good terms with each other. One fine day a lucky turn of fortune had reinstated her. And why? Was Fate playing her a trick, after all? she seemed to be asking herself as she walked in silence beside her cousin, gazing with sulky, questioning eyes at the green depths on either side of the avenue, and then at the burning blue sky overhead. Henriette was the first to break silence.

"Are you cross about anything, Paula, dear?"

"I?— What could I possibly have to be cross

about?" The tone did not match the words, and Henriette spoke again, this time with some slight hesitation.

"Is it because Maman had one of her little fits of impatience?"

"Oh, well, if I began to take count of that sort of thing!" Paula lifted a bright, intelligent face toward her cousin; her blue eyes shone with something more than mere mischief, and there was more than irony in her answer. "Just now Auntie is putting a terrible strain on herself to be patient, gentle, and indulgent. This is not at all natural to her, and tries her dreadfully, so she is obliged to make up for it in other ways."

"And are all these efforts made on my account?" asked Henriette with a smile.

"Well, she certainly would not put herself out for me."

They had reached one of the little iron park gates. Just beside it, fastened to the trunk of a large tree, was the letter box, which the postman emptied every day as he passed. The abrupt way in which Paula threw in her envelope enlightened Henriette suddenly. "Did you want to accept that invitation?"

"Oh! I never let myself wish for anything. It's waste of time." Paula turned sharp

around on her heels and walked quickly up the avenue, holding her back very straight and grinding her heels into the gravel, like a child in a very bad temper. Henriette could not help smiling. "It's funny how little you've changed. You are just the little girl you always were." She was touched to see how much of the child really remained in Paula. She took her arm affectionately, but the other drew away. "Don't you remember the old days?"

"Yes, only too well!" and Paula stopped, choked with sobs. The climax had come, and the pent-up feelings of the last few weeks suddenly burst out. The thicket was clearer on one side of the path and formed a kind of arbor, where seats were placed. Paula threw herself into a chair and hid her face in her hands as she leaned against the rustic table. "It's because I remember the past so well that the present seems so hard!"

Paula had been an enigma to Henriette ever since the latter's return. The girl had barely seemed to recognize her cousin, and there had been no warmth in her greeting. She had met her with an intentionally ceremonious manner, and even the enforced contact of family life had not broken the ice. On the contrary, there

was a barely veiled hostility in the necessary forms of politeness which Paula was obliged to show Henriette, and her antagonism seemed to grow daily. At last Henriette understood. Poor little Paula was certainly to be pitied! A motherless girl, neglected by an adventurer father, brought up amongst money troubles, till Mme. Le Hallier took her as a stop-gap and an innocent victim of maternal disappointment. She was now confronted by her cousin's unexpected return, and was to be defrauded of her rightful compensation, the dowry and inheritance promised for the last six years, and held up before her eyes as a dazzling bait. Really, much could be forgiven her, but although Henriette was equally conscious of the false position, she could not at first put her thoughts into words. She hesitated, as one does before the unknown.

How had Paula developed during this long separation? Was she still an impulsive child, unable to control or hide her first impressions, but willing on second thoughts to take advice? Or was she a woman, and if so, what kind of woman? Now that the moment for explanation had come, Henriette still glanced hesitatingly at Paula, who was sulkily drying her eyes, and evidently feeling herself that such a

scene must be brought to some logical conclusion. A single sunbeam, piercing the green branches, fell on Henriette's pale golden hair and Paula's ruddier head, lighting up their white summer dresses. A stranger, struck by the resemblance and looking at them in their grassy solitude, on this bright and happy summer's day, would have taken them for sisters born to love each other and pass their lives together. Henriette felt how alike they were. She seemed to see in Paula a sort of double, not of herself as she was now, but as she might and perhaps would have been if she had remained in the world. Paula had the same profile, with less severe features and a brighter expression, the same family golden hair, but redder. Her figure was the same, but not so majestic. Paula was Henriette on a smaller scale, younger but with more prettiness and less real beauty, more brilliancy and less grace. But the one great difference was in the eyes. Henriette's, inherited from her father, were dark and dreamy, full of changing lights. Paula's were true Marigny eyes, blue, brilliant, sparkling, passionately and ardently fixed on whatever their owner might long to possess, the eyes of a fighter with the steely gleam of a sword in their depths, but with no shadow of

falseness in them. They blazed when Henriette slowly began to speak at last.

"You used to love me dearly— Don't you care at all for me any longer—not a little bit—in the bottom of your heart?" Silence. Henriette persisted. "At least you are as frank as ever."

"Yes, that is true."

"Well, then, be frank with me. What have I done that you should cease to care for me?"

"I haven't cared for you for ten years—ever since you went away."

Henriette was taken back; she had not expected such an answer. Paula had broken the ice and was opening her heart at last.

"It is I who remember and you who forget! But perhaps you did not even realize what I felt for you. Affection was too mild a word—it was adoration for the pretty grown-up cousin of twenty who condescended to take notice of a poor little wretch like me, badly brought up and insufferable, a favorite with no one else. I took all this kindness and tenderness for myself. I was perfectly infatuated about you. I gave my whole self in return. And you—you deceived me; I can call it nothing else. You were only acting from a sense

of duty, giving me the scraps and leavings of your love of God, and one fine day you went off without caring what I felt, and left me to go and look after goodness knows what gutter-brats, with the same impersonal charity. That was my first disappointment, the first time I was ever deceived, and it changed my whole being; all my illusions were destroyed forever. I have never been the same since. You taught me how little dependence can be placed on other people's affection, and how foolish it is to set one's heart on any one. I learned it too young. It did me harm. I have never forgiven you, and I never can. I wouldn't go to see you in your convent, though for that matter no one would have taken me, for you were in disgrace, your name was never mentioned here, and it was this which finally convinced me that you had really done us some injury and that I was right to bear you a grudge. And now you suddenly reappear on the scene and I am expected to take up the thread again and begin to pet and admire you— Well, I can't!—I can't!—The past is all sticking in my throat——” She pointed to her slim white neck in its little starched collar. “In spite of my efforts, I can't swallow it, and I'm sure I never shall!”

“But my poor child, do you suppose because

the love of God was greater than my love for you, that I had no affection at all for you?"

Henriette was as much moved as Paula, but she had learned to practice self-control.

"Not only did I feel leaving you," she went on in her low, sweet voice, "but I hesitated at going at all. I felt that you needed me. You don't know what it is to leave any one dear to you and in real need of you! But I said to myself when I thought of your future what I said of Maman's old age: 'Almighty God will take care of them, since He calls me elsewhere.' When I heard you were living together I believed He had heard my prayer, for I always prayed you might take my place— You must admit that it is not my fault that I have had to come back. Nothing is wanting to my ordeal; I did not think it would be so cruel; when I left my poor convent I little dreamed that I should be upsetting the lives of my nearest and dearest, those whose happiness was my only joy."

"Then you think my disappointment comes from interested motives? You believe I was counting on what I should inherit?"

"No, indeed, I never thought of such a thing. Besides, why should anything be altered?"

Paula refused to listen. "Did I come here

of my own accord?" she went on, lashing herself into fury. "I wanted to go with Father to Madagascar, but he refused to take me. He left me with Aunt against my will. I knew she didn't care for me, I felt I shouldn't be happy, and it is quite true, I am not. But when people are obliged to live together, things manage to sort themselves, and at any rate it is some compensation for me to feel that I was of some use in the world, and had some kind of a position. Now you are here, I am useless, ridiculous, and only in the way. You can't deny that I am superfluous, and consequently embarrass you both. Every moment of the day your mother repents of her folly in bringing me here as a barrier between you, and as she can't get rid of me she is beginning to hate the sight of me. She revenges herself on me for what you have made her suffer, she bears me a grudge for living here at all with you, and wishes me at the convent in exchange. Can you deny this?"

"No. But it is no fault of mine, and I feel it more than you do. There might be a way out of it, if you would only listen to me. Why won't you be my sister, my darling little sister——?"

"Your sister!— Your sisters are at the convent," said Paula furiously. "Your heart is

there, and not with us; all you have to give us is constraint and forced amiability; your kind words are only so many efforts of charity, and do not in the least impress me. I am not going to repay you with real, true affection, meant for you alone, the only sort of love I understand. All or nothing is my idea of being really fond of any one."

"And then you reproach my mother for showing favoritism? But you yourself have the kind of nature that makes affection a torture to itself——"

"And a burden to others—that's what you mean, isn't it? No, I am forewarned; I care for no one in the world, and I will never, never let myself again. Besides, who is there to love? Who wants me? All the better, perhaps; at least I can have no more to suffer."

A new expression passed over her features. Was it regret, anger, or pique? Henriette realized that Paula was certainly no longer a child. But the latter hurriedly changed the subject and returned to her original grievance.

"To be really fair and honest," she continued, "how could you expect us to get on, when our ideas are so diametrically opposed? All you are thinking of is your 'vocation,' as you call it. Well, that doesn't appeal to me in the least;

and after all I'm not aware that I am obliged to yearn for the cloister. I have a right to be as the world, I suppose!"

"But that is all the more reason I should understand you. My vocation helps me to understand that people can be called to other kinds of life, and I would like to help you——"

"Yes, I know, out of charity, and theoretically— I know the system. You pose as a victim, and meanwhile you don't care what sacrifices other people are called upon to make. You make no allowances, and do not care what goes on around you. You follow your own tastes and ideas. You have the upper hand now, and you make every one do what you want without the slightest compunction. What pleasure or liberty have you left me, for instance? I quite admit that I like going into society, the society of the dreadful, wicked world outside; at least it is better than living with relations, and I can forget what I have to put up with here. I am deprived even of that now! In order not to shock you, the house has been turned into a miniature convent; here we are, walled in, hardly allowed to look up or open our mouths; even Aunt puts on a pious expression. We can only go out to Mass. We

are obliged to refuse even a wretched little dinner-party at a neighbor's house——”

In spite of all Henriette could not help smiling. Paula was really very babyish still. “And I am bored to death,” concluded she; “bored to distraction, to the verge of madness. This kind of life makes me vicious and spiteful; I feel it has already!”

She seemed half ashamed after her outburst of spite, but had no intention of apologizing. She could think of no better way to end the conversation than to turn around quickly, snatch up her dress, and hurry away. She looked over her shoulder like a bad-tempered child, to see if Henriette would forget her dignity and follow. But the latter's thoughts were elsewhere. She sat down and passed her hand over her eyes. “So it is not enough to be uprooted from one's destined path, but one must be an obstacle in the way of others!” Paula had spoken the truth in calling the nuns Henriette's real sisters. How she missed them! She had still hoped in Paris to see her late Superior, but Mme. Van Stilmont had only written on leaving.

“As Mother Ste. H  l  ne did not come to see me, she must have had other more pressing duties. How can she bear the life of a gov-

erness? Still, I feel sure she is resigned to it and finds some means of doing good," sighed Henriette. "To conquer the world by suffering and love!" These words returned to her memory as a plan of campaign. Her first conquest must be little Paula, who seemed brought into her life for some special purpose; with her strange, contradictory temperament and rebellious nature, she was badly in want of help. "I didn't take her the right way; I must try again," reflected Henriette, as she made her way back to the house. Mme. Le Hallier was watching her from the window, as she had watched her go out. "She is walking more quickly than usual," she reflected, "and stops now and then as she used to do when she was very preoccupied. Her dresses suit her, and her hair is beginning to grow. She is still so young and pretty!—much prettier than Paula. Oh, if only she would listen to me!"

Henriette found her mother busy with the newspaper when she came in. She took her place again beside Mme. Le Hallier. They exchanged commonplaces with the inevitable feeling of constraint, which the most conscientious efforts on both sides never seemed to diminish. Suddenly Mme. Le Hallier pricked up her

ears. "Maman, since we have been here," Henriette was saying, "I notice that you see no one. I suppose this is on my account, but I should be very sorry to interfere with your usual habits."

"I wish for no one when I have you with me, darling."

"But others may be surprised or wounded at having the door shut on them."

"If you think so, open it yourself——"

Henriette perceived the trap, and pulled herself up.

"Surely without my going into society, where I am quite out of place, you could——"

"Visit strangers and receive them while my own daughter keeps in the background! I could never do such a thing as that."

Mme. Le Hallier let her newspaper drop into her lap.

"You will admit," she said, speaking in a severe voice to hide the feelings aroused in her, "that I did not begin this discussion, but now you have started the subject yourself I must tell you what I think once for all. You must not imagine you can live here as you did in the convent. In the first place, it would look eccentric and undignified, and secondly, it would mean giving up any good you could do in the

world. I suppose you do not wish to live an utterly selfish life?"

"Certainly not——"

"Then what is gained by putting off the inevitable alternative? Of course I can quite understand that you feel some slight shrinking, but you must overcome it, and, believe me, the sooner the better. Under such peculiar circumstances, my dear child, the best thing is to make your position quite clear before people begin to conjecture, gossip, or invent. Nothing puts an end to gossip so effectually as definite fact. Behave naturally and at the same time let it be seen that you are quite firm and resolute, and no one will dream of criticizing you. After all, what is there to criticize?"

The special pleadings prepared in silence for days and weeks past were now poured clearly and vehemently into Henriette's ears. The speech rolled on, leaving no pause for interruptions, turning difficult corners, and answering all objections as it went.

"Religious life for women is not the same as the priesthood. Nuns do not receive, as priests do, an indelibly sacred seal. If they are dispensed from their vows they become absolutely free; they are even obliged to take up their liberty when their homes are closed and

their Order dissolved. No other choice is left them but to go back among their relations and friends, and the strictest people do not blame them. In fact, the case has now become so common that no one is even surprised at meeting them in society. Now listen to me. I know perfectly well what is making this change so hard for you; it is all the ideas that they put into your heads in convents. You are spouses of Christ, voluntarily dead to the world and all the rest of it, and this makes so many barriers to all natural thoughts and wishes. The very word 'unfrocked' is a nun's idea, and means nothing in the world, for we think of your habit only as a uniform voluntarily assumed or discarded; your mystic union is but a pious chimaera. The ring you wear on your finger is merely a pious emblem, and counts for nothing. Your life is unpledged, no irreparable change has happened to you, you are just the same as when you left here six years ago. Look at yourself in the glass. You are beautiful, beloved, and happy; luckier than any girl I know——"

"But I am not a girl like others——"

Henriette turned away from the mirror before which her mother had forced her to stand. Something about her image, with its pale, sad

face, and strange aureole of short hair seemed to make a sudden impression on Mme. Le Hallier. "Then you shall become like other girls again," she cried, seizing her daughter in her arms with an angry, defiant look. Henriette remained silent. Already Mme. Le Hallier was beginning to repent of having allowed her naturally violent disposition to upset her diplomatic plans; she sat down beside Henriette, who looked sad and weary of the discussion. "Don't let's talk of it any more. You shall decide for yourself how and when you like. I have no wishes than yours."

"But we have not ourselves only to think of. There's Paula."

"Paula!"

The disdainful voice in which Mme. Le Hallier generally spoke of Paula took on quite a different inflection. So Paula had worked upon Henriette! "Yes, girls of her age like a cheerful life. She is very glad to see something of our neighbors, for our circle is very small and quiet; I have only kept in touch with a few old friends because they liked to talk of you; people like dear Mlle. Doncet, for instance. You remember her, don't you?"

Certainly the vision evoked was humble and modest enough, Heaven knows. Mlle. Doncet

was a good, pious old maid, with one shoulder higher than the other, always dressed in black, a tertiary of one of the Orders, who gave working parties for making clothes for the poor. "She was so anxious to have us at one of her quiet little luncheons—her only relaxation. She would be so delighted if you would come!" Mme. Le Hallier stopped. Henriette remained quite still with downcast eyes for five or six seconds. Then: "There is nothing to prevent my going to Mlle. Doncet," she said.

The week which elapsed before the luncheon was the most distressing Henriette had yet spent since she left the convent. She realized the meaning of the apparently insignificant concession she had willingly allowed to be forced out of her. What was done in the case of one old friend could not be refused to others. Mlle. Doncet's door was the gate through which she would re-enter the world. The world! She had feared the glimpses she had had of it in former days, and now felt a sort of horror of it. She could not rid herself of the sensation of being a bird with clipped wings, obliged to drag about on broken pinions with a desperate longing for the blue heights to which it could no longer soar. Added to

this was the natural human feeling of shyness, the personal feminine dread of being conspicuous. Then would come reaction, the will to control herself, the resolve to forget and immolate herself. Paula must be pacified and her future provided for. Meanwhile the bare idea of Mlle. Doncet's lunch would bring beads of perspiration to her forehead.

"Do you think any one else will be there?" she asked her mother, as the carriage drove up the little incline leading to the old maid's house with its red-shingled roof. Mme. Le Hallier made a gesture of doubt. "Oh, there's always some one there," said Paula quickly. She was facing them on the little seat of the victoria. "I suppose you know who might be there?" This time there was no answer. Paula looked more amiable to-day in her shady white straw hat, her eyes had smiles in them and were as blue as the cornflowers in the field below. Harvest had not yet begun. Ocher-colored wheat and light green oats shivered in the wind till the sloping field looked like a billowing sea. Wreaths of honeysuckle draped the hedges. Summer had come. In a few days the fields would be bare beneath the burning sun, and the last treasures of spring spread themselves before the eye in all the beauty they were so

soon to lose. Henriette had not noticed where she was. She started and looked around with awakened eyes. It was the old path; there were the well-known poplar trees and the willows on either side. Yonder was the little fountain under the beech-trees. Could the real Henriette Le Hallier be here once more? She drew in life-luring draughts of the sweet air. The ghost was beginning to forget the grave. Her pretty laugh re-echoed in her own ears; how long since she had heard it! "Maman! Look! There's the place where my donkey always would stop, the donkey you bought me at Melun Fair; I never *could* make him go."

"Because for once you found some one more obstinate than yourself," remarked Mme. Le Hallier, not at all sorry to recall that early defeat. The victoria passed through a narrow gateway. On either side of a sloping road were a miniature vineyard, a tiny field, a little potato-patch—in fact, a complete farm on a small scale. A few trees made a shady little nook, then came small lawns, and then a garden of the same dimensions, planted so thickly with flowers that they overflowed their borders. Henriette as a child had always thought of it as a Nuremburg toy, or the enchanted domain of some kind Fairy Carabosse. Other

children had come in their turn to take possession of this land of delights, which seemed expressly planned to suit them. A fat baby rushed out of the doorway, nearly under the horses' feet, closely pursued by an anxious nurse. Under a shady horse-chestnut was a peculiarly shaped perambulator, a kind of oblong couch on wheels arranged with pillows, from which rose a tiny expectant head covered with dark curls. Paula got out, blowing a friendly kiss. Mme. Le Hallier turned to her daughter, remarking quietly, "They are poor Jean de Vernières' children." Henriette looked fixedly at the group, noticing that they wore white with black ribbons. "Is Jean de Vernières dead?" she asked. For six years no one had heard that tone of stifled grief in her voice, nor seen that look of anguish on her face. "No," answered Mme. Le Hallier carelessly; "they are in mourning for their mother."

Henriette stood still for a moment, uncertain whether to go forward or turn back. Was not the present enough? Must the past resuscitate at her very first step into this accursed "world"? But it was too late to turn back now. On the threshold appeared a tiny black figure, a little more wrinkled and bent than six years ago, and behind it some one whom Henriette

rather guessed at than saw. It was Jean. Paula had turned round, and Henriette pulled herself together under that searching glance. Following her mother and Mlle. Doncet, she crossed the narrow hall, where the same old rustic hanging-basket contained a trailing bunch of the plant called "Ruine de Rome," a skein of little grayish leaves, pale blossoms and thin, tangled stems, fit emblem of the life of an old maid.

When she reached the little drawing-room Henriette bent her head; she tried not to look at the man standing before her, and yet in the first glance she had seen him and noticed every trifling change in his appearance. He was still the same; gentle and grave-looking, the friend of her childhood, who for one brief period she could have chosen for her life-companion. The only difference was that he was thinner and slightly aged. His beard, which was now trimmed to a point, and his slightly grizzled temples, made his face look more serious. Jean on his side had no reason to feel confused. Fortunately neither he nor any one else had ever guessed what had been the secret of one girlish heart so many years ago. But the actual situation could not fail to be embarrassing in so far as he did not quite know what to say to this

ghost returned from the grave. What was he to call her, Madame, Mademoiselle, Ma Sœur? But Henriette remembered that Jean had always been tactful. "Good morning, Henriette," he said quite simply, as in old days. And she as simply answered, "Bonjour, Jean!"

CHAPTER V

AN OPPORTUNITY

THE book of the past had opened, but the page was blank. There had been no avowal between Jean and Henriette, no word or look of meaning. She had known him all her life, but not even intimately. They had met at long intervals in the country, during the holidays, while Jean was a schoolboy, and less often after he left St. Cyr for a cavalry regiment. She had let herself dwell on the thought of him as the incarnation of some vague distant ideal, which she did not even try to bring into her life. Young, with endless vistas of time, patience, and hope before her, she had allowed months and years to roll by in a quiet, indefinite expectation. Then suddenly old M. des Vernières had arrived at St. Germier triumphantly announcing his son's engagement. The marriage fulfilled and even surpassed his parental ambition. Jean was marrying the daughter of a Washington banker, and his father was quite wild at the moment about everything outside his own

country. He could do nothing but praise American women. They were the best type of the modern wife, the real hope for the future. "Good health, serious education, huge fortune, everything we want to revive our anemic, impoverished families." Henriette could still hear him. Stunned by his triumphant arguments, she felt something die in her own heart and melt away as a dream fades before the light of day. Nothing was changed externally, but the ideal which she had lost was perhaps the best thing she had known in life. Days and weeks passed, leaving her with a sensation of irremediable loss and unfulfilled hope, which she would hardly acknowledge, even to herself. To harbor even a regret for a man who was marrying another woman seemed a crime to the stern moralist of eighteen. "It was childish folly," she said to herself, belittling her grief, that she might suffer less and cure herself the quicker. But the idea never crossed her mind of setting her heart on any other man, or wishing to marry. Circumstances had combined to turn her powers of loving into another channel, or perhaps she had but followed her destiny in turning to the Divine Ideal.

There was no trace of disappointment or bitterness underlying the religious vocation,

which entirely absorbed her. Jean, instead of being an obstacle in her way, forcing her to turn aside, had been the stepping-stone to higher things. As she rose his image faded, and at last disappeared in the distance. In entering the convent she had put aside all her past, only remembering human and worldly things from the divine standpoint, and she had felt as if her heart was no longer the same as in her girlhood. It was lifeless and dead, enclosed in a silver or golden urn, and Almighty God Himself had fashioned her a new heart of purer clay. Now, after so many years, it gave her a strange shock to feel the old heart beating again, with all the emotion and timid uncertainty of the past. She was obliged to remind herself that Jean and his father were both beside her, perfectly calm and untroubled, and that it was she herself only who felt much difficulty in linking up the broken chain of her life.

She was the only one returned from the grave; those about her were living their usual lives; any unexpected turns of fate were quite within their calculations, and nothing seemed unnatural about the meeting. Of course Henriette's reappearance in society was a little event which required tactful and delicate handling. Mlle. Doncet had sounded Mme. Le

Hallier on the subject, and had understood that a few guests, of exactly the right kind, could be safely invited to meet her. The dear Des Vernières, her neighbors, were just the right people, well bred, with correct "views" and quite "good style." Added to which they were in mourning, and in charge of an invalid child. The son was such a perfect gentleman and so right-minded! The father was perhaps a little more frivolous, but age would soon put all that right; he was a good seventy-five now! And they were both very good-looking in their different ways, and an addition to any party. Old M. des Vernières had a kind face, half-smothered in a white beard; he was a lively old man, very garrulous, interested in everything and everybody, and apt to be much too expansive. In his hurry to grasp a new idea, no matter what, he was often rather officious in interfering and offering suggestions. He stopped at nothing; deaf to all hints and incapable of taking a snubbing, he would ride roughshod over everybody else's feelings and hesitations and plunge head foremost into other people's arrangements. "The prize muddler," Mme. Le Hallier called him, her lip curling in a sneer.

This morning, however, she was mildness

itself, and Monsieur des Vernières at his best. With wise forethought he was put next to Henriette at table. If she behaved with conventional stiffness or shyness, his noisy conversation would fill up any gaps; and while he was holding forth, the others could take breath before playing their own rather difficult parts. Duly forewarned, he steered carefully between the rocks with unusual tact, and everybody was beginning to think that the somewhat awkward luncheon party would go off well, when suddenly he hit upon Madagascar.

"That's the sort of place to try a new venture," he burst out, in one of his sudden fits of enthusiasm, which nothing could stop. "The other day I met a young fellow who had bought a plantation near Tananarivo, and he told me how productive the place is. Cheerful life, healthy, pleasant climate. He's in an awful state at having to sell his property and come back to France to cure his ague. Ah, Mademoiselle Paula, I congratulate you on having that glorious journey before you. But you mustn't start in the autumn or you'll get a rough passage. The present time is just perfect."

"My things aren't ready yet," said Paula,

with flashing eyes, in the midst of a dead silence.

"Now, that's another mistaken idea, taking such heaps of things with you, as if you were going to land on a desert island! As a matter of fact, the Madagascar women are excellent dressmakers. Hasn't your father told you that, by way of inducement to come out to him?" M. des Vernières, in his exasperating way, had made up his mind that it was quite time for Paula to go out and keep house for her father, and he had to be headed off on to colonial politics. In a few moments he had demolished all received ideas and started a complete set of new theories.

"He's quite unchanged," reflected Henriette, with the strange surprise she felt at persons and things being still the same. "But how poor Jean has altered," she suddenly concluded. Her imprisoned heart was beginning to break its bonds, and across her mental vision passed the image she had vowed never to remember; Jean in his shining lieutenant's uniform, his brown eyes full of light, a trustful, boyish smile on his lips. The face had not changed, but the light had gone out of his eyes, and something beyond even his bereavement seemed to have darkened his whole

life. To crush all the youth out of him surely repeated blows must have fallen; he must have known daily, harassing anxieties. He sat opposite Henriette, and she could see how all through the meal he kept turning his head to listen for sounds from the next room, where the children were at table with their nursery governess. Sounds of anger were audible—then a scolding in English, and weary, pathetic sobs, which cut Henriette to the heart, while old Monsieur des Vernières continued his monologue undisturbed. He discussed art, literature, and society in turn.

“From time to time I have a little flutter in Paris. The other night I went to see *L’Embûche*; have you seen it? Oh, what am I saying? Of course—of course—I beg your pardon if I shock you. I simply adore the theater, and I must admit that it is a real sacrifice on my part to bury myself alive here.”

“Do you live here altogether now?”

“Yes, since Jean resigned his commission.”

“Has he left the army?”

Henriette was abruptly shaken out of her apathy. She could not picture Jean no longer a soldier. She remembered his devotion to his profession. Underneath his smart, modern military appearance had always been the half

mystic enthusiasm of the true soldier, and as a girl she herself, feeling the first stirrings of her own love of sacrifice and abnegation, had fancied she understood him better than any one else. Had the divine fire been extinguished in him also?

"Do you mean to say you didn't see the whole thing in the papers?" continued M. des Vernières. "Oh—of course, I forget. You didn't read them. Well, it was at the time of the dispersions in Brittany. Jean was singled out to head his men, as a good way of finding out which officers were professing Catholics, and naturally he preferred sending in his papers to doing such dirty work as that."

So he had cut short his career and given up the desire of his heart, not out of sheer apathy, but as a sacrifice. He, too, was one of the victims of the great persecution, which once again has bound together the soldier, the monk, and the nun in a common tie of heroism and abnegation.

"The poor boy," continued M. des Vernières, anxious to give her all the details, "has really had no luck; the most unforeseen troubles have come to him. You never met my daughter-in-law, I think? No, you had left when she first came here— She looked the kind of woman to

live to be a hundred—tall, well-built, with a splendid complexion; active, busy, always running about, bicycling, motoring, playing tennis, dancing—and after Jack's birth she suddenly collapsed and went into a kind of decline! Her splendid appearance, her hygienic exercises, games, and the rest were a complete sham—like everything else to do with the whole affair, I must add! Here's my poor son a widower with two children on his hands! Jack is a perfect little fiend, a savage, a cowboy, quite impossible to manage, and poor Linette the opposite extreme! Did they show her to you, in her little invalid carriage?"

"I saw it in the distance."

"Well, you will see her quite near," and M. des Vernières heaved a sigh full of meaning. Then making sure that Jean was not listening, he proceeded with his explanations.

"Her father refuses to have her operated on, which is ridiculous. She has worn a surgical appliance for two years without getting any good from it, and every specialist has examined her. We drag her from one 'cure' to another. First the mother, now the child! What a life for my poor son! A Sister of Charity couldn't do more, and perhaps wouldn't do as much."

Henriette mentally drew another comparison. "Who would have thought, eight years ago, that Jean's life would be a greater sacrifice than mine?"

Whether she wished it or no, she found herself initiated into every detail of that life, as if every one around her was trying his or her best to fill the gaps which their separation had left.

After lunch the men went into the smoking-room, Paula wandered out into the garden, and Henriette had to listen to Mlle. Doncet, who, in search of edifying topics, could think of nothing better than the sorrows and virtues of Jean. She went over the same ground as old M. des Vernières: the wife's death, Linette's illness, and his great self-sacrifice in giving up his commission. "It was all the more credit to him," she ended, "because he is not at all well off. His American father-in-law and mother-in-law, who were to leave such millions, are practically ruined."

"M. des Vernières must have often regretted the marriage he was so anxious for," remarked Mme. Le Hallier. Something in her voice suggested that she had not forgotten his visit to St. Germier eight years ago.

But why sit thinking of useless things, which

were no concern of hers, reflected Henriette. She was free to go and join Paula, and went in search of her.

Her first steps in the garden brought her to what she instinctively dreaded to see. Under the big chestnut-tree, its branches casting shadows over half the little lawn, sat the English nursery governess, sedate and demure in her starched white cotton gown; and beside her the invalid carriage, with the child's dark head vainly trying to raise itself. Henriette began to feel drawn to the poor little suffering creature. When she got near, she could not resist the great black eyes brightening with shy hope in the delicate, pretty face. In the sunny part of the garden Paula and Jack were running after each other and playing with a great deal of cheerful noise. Henriette bent over the little prisoner, who naïvely raised her forehead to be kissed. With the kiss all else was forgotten. Linette was no longer Jean's child; she was only a poor, suffering, afflicted child, an unlucky being to whom the ex-nun might freely minister.

For the first time since she left the convent her sense of oppression was lifted; she could almost fancy herself back in that blessed atmosphere of purity and peace. Linette felt the

congenial influence, and was quite at ease with the newcomer. Here was a friend, some one who seemed hers by right, some one who was attracted to her by that very affliction and stigma of helplessness which cut her off from the rest of the world.

It was Jean who broke in upon their intimacy. As he came out in his turn, he stopped beside his little daughter with a look of gratitude. "It is too good of you, Henriette, to take an interest in the child," he said.

"It is a pleasure to me. I am so accustomed to children. We had forty in our class in the Rue de Grenelle." Henriette spoke quickly, determined that the words between them should leave no doubt about what she had been, and of how she still intended him to think of her.

But Jean did not seem at all disposed to forget it. With fine soldierly frankness, he went straight to the subject which the others dreaded to approach. "How you must have felt leaving the convent!"

"Yes, I felt it terribly, more deeply than any one knows."

"That I can quite believe. People of our world, or of the world in general, however well-meaning, don't in the least realize the injustice you have had to bear."

"Still, plenty of people have protested—We have had very devoted champions——"

"Yes, indeed you have. But they did not know everything, and were not able to say all they would."

Henriette sat down mechanically on a campstool. With downcast eyes, that did not behold the speaker, she let herself drift in the wonder of hearing Jean's voice again. It was not the constrained, altered inflection of his first words to her, but the old voice of long ago. As he spoke, the man's soul showed itself unchanged also.

"Your case is very like ours; and public opinion will never quite realize what we felt. When an officer is put in the dilemma of choosing between his honor and his career (a much more cowardly expedient for getting rid of us than the dispersion of the Orders), many excellent people take his part. But what are they indignant about? In most cases they are angry because he loses his pay, his chances of advancement, and his rank, which in many cases are all he has to depend on. They are equally distressed about dispossessed, banished, old, or invalid nuns, when these latter are deprived of home or support. Those who can find any kind of work, or make money, are less

pitied, if at all. The material consequences are all the world regrets. No one dreams of blaming our persecutors for their principal offense against us. After all, what are designs against our liberty or our careers compared to the hindrance to spiritual aspirations, or to the loss of peace and happiness, which in some cases are gone forever? For those who have once aspired to supernatural consolations can never be satisfied with the ordinary commonplaces of existence. Is it not supreme irony to offer them, in exchange for their ideals, those petty worldly satisfactions which they had long ago learned to despise and discard?"

"Ah, that is the real pain," murmured Henriette. Jean was the first to put his finger on the wound which was sapping her very life. He probed it to the depths.

"Among the officers who have resigned, I give you my word that those I pity most are the young men of fortune and birth, who chose a military career for the sake of hard work and trials of all kinds, men who were born to a life of easy pleasure, and who longed to sacrifice it to duty. Nothing can give them back their ideal. And among laïcized nuns those most to be pitied are the women who had most to lose, and who are now obliged to return to the world

and begin over again the old struggle with themselves and those about them."

"Oh, how right you are! What we get in exchange is no consolation. It is a burden." Henriette felt this already. Youth, wealth, and the love which others prize so much, only seemed to weigh her down. Even Jean's sympathy——

Before her mind rose the vision of the nuns she had helped to dress for their last sleep in their long violet habits, sleepers over whom the *Magnificat* and not the *De Profundis* had been chanted; and she would have chosen rather to lie with them at peace beneath the white stones of the convent sanctuary than to be here in this perfumed, flowering garden. "A broken life," she murmured, "is worse than death."

"Who knows that better than I?" answered Jean with a sigh.

They had forgotten Linette, who up till then had gazed at them with the quiet "good girl" expression of the child who is paying no attention to what grown-up people are talking about. But either the word *death* spoken by Henriette, or her father's sad face, had disturbed her, and she began to cry.

"One must be careful of everything with

her. You can't imagine how sensitive she is," said Jean to Henriette. Gradually the old friendly voice and ways were coming back to him. He only stiffened again when he saw Paula suddenly rush out from the box-hedge, which shut in the small raised terrace in front of the house. She and Jack had just finished running a race up the grass slope, and they were laughing breathlessly, one as wild and almost as childish pink and white as the other. Jack was absolutely yelling with joy and triumph. Henriette tried to hold him, but he chafed and struggled to get away, shaking his thick gold curls as a horse shakes his mane, and refusing to listen or look at anything. The boy was a splendid child, a perfect little human animal, the extreme opposite of poor little sad-eyed Linette. Paula leaned against the chestnut-tree, pinning up a flounce of her dress, which was half on the ground, while Jean considered the group with some dismay.

"Did my young savage do that?"

Paula shook her blonde head. "Oh, dear, no! You needn't apologize; I am quite capable of doing foolish things myself," she remarked, deftly settling her pins, "and luckily I can repair them. Tearing first and mending afterward—that is exactly what suits me."

The theory exactly described her character, too; bizarre caprice, and strange, incomprehensible changes alternated in her to an extent that made her in turn attractive and repellent. She was impetuous and brusque to an almost unbearable extent, but no one could be angry with her for long. Who, for instance, looking at her now, would treasure up against her the spiteful looks and words she had given her cousin so lately?

She took Henriette's place by the invalid carriage, and Jean looked gratefully at her, while Linette's eyes sparkled with joy. The sun made a nimbus round her fleecy, golden hair. Everything seemed concentrated on her. In the narrow garden, the miniature world of Nature and humanity, she was the center of attraction, the personification of youth and vitality. She evidently realized this, for her face for once was completely serene.

At the sound of her clear laugh Henriette looked at her, and beheld once more the Paula of old days. But with this glance into the past, the young nun was conscious of a strange, involuntary comparison. Had she ever dreamed of comparing herself to women living in the world while she was in the convent? She checked the thought instantly.

"What a glorious thing to be young!" she said with a smile.

"But I'm not so wonderfully young as all that!" Paula turned round, blushing with anger and sudden self-consciousness. "How much difference is there between us? Only seven years and a half, to be quite accurate."

"Age depends less on the number of years than on the kind of life one leads," remarked Jean, before Henriette could say exactly the same thing.

Paula blushed violently. "Well, haven't my years of life been trying and boring enough? With a father out in Madagascar, an aunt like mine, and all our worries and difficulties?—Don't you think I have learned *some* patience and experience, and a little worldly wisdom?"

This touch of pathos did not make much impression.

"Oh, very well, then!" she exclaimed pettishly; "I'm *very* young, if you will have it so. And what of it? Youth is a power and a resource. Young people can learn anything; we can be molded and trained, improved, changed if necessary; we have the future before us and the right to believe in ourselves. Youth is not a bad thing. I want to keep young as long as possible, and I am proud of my youth as my

greatest advantage. We *are* young, Jack, aren't we?"

"And so am I," echoed the weak voice of Linette in her invalid carriage.

An agonized look passed over Jean's face, and there was silence.

"Well, which of you is so aggressively youthful?" asked a jovial voice, as old M. des Vernières joined the group, without any fear that he might be making a painful situation worse. He had the serene audacity of a savage tramping about among electric wires.

Paula burst into noisy laughter. "*You*, dear Monsieur!" she said with flashing eyes. "It is you who are so astonishingly young!" and ran off, leaving him undecided as to whether she had meant to compliment or insult him. He had the good sense to ignore the latter alternative.

"What a spoiled child!" he exclaimed to Mme. Le Hallier, who came up behind him. "Why do you treat her as the Benjamin of the family? Still," turning to Henriette, "I expect she keeps you amused with all her nonsense."

Governess and nurse had both gone toward the house, one wheeling the invalid carriage and the other dragging Jack along, and the

mare between the shafts of the little English trap had succeeded in kicking up all the gravel of Mlle. Doncet's little carriage-drive before Jean could induce his father to leave the scene of such a pleasant social gathering.

"Mme. Le Hallier is really charming," he announced at the second turn of the wheels. "And make no mistake, she is a very superior woman."

"You used to think her so disagreeable," remarked Jean, less enthusiastically.

"She did not give herself a chance, wrapped up as she was in grief at losing her daughter. She has become quite her old self again, now she has captured her Henriette."

"But she won't keep her."

"Why not? Her Order is dissolved and her vows annulled. Now she is no longer a nun; the only thing to do is to take up her life as usual. You see she means to go into society again; she lunched with us, and in a light summer dress trimmed with lace, too, like anybody else."

Jean had nothing to say. All day the anomaly of Henriette's position had made itself felt, and he asked himself what she was really intending to do. Yet what was to be done? Nothing. Things must remain as they

were. Still, to go on wearing her habit, and behaving as a nun, would be as impossible as to adopt the air, style, and conversation of a society woman. She seemed condemned to appear what she was not, and to conceal her real feelings.

"And with no way out of the deadlock," Jean was forced to admit to himself.

But old M. des Vernières did not trouble his head with psychological problems. The air had grown cooler, and as they drove along between the scented hedges he continued to dwell on his pleasant morning's entertainment.

"Madame Le Hallier is delightful," he repeated, his prejudice quite overcome, "and the girls aren't at all bad looking."

"Mademoiselle Paula is decidedly pretty."

"So is the other."

"I can't say. I'm not a fair judge. I can't look upon Henriette as a woman at all."

"Why in the world not? Because she was in a convent for a year or two? What ridiculous affectation! I have an idea in my head about that young lady!"

Jean felt he had good reason to dread his father's next inspiration. He whipped his pony into a trot. But M. des Vernières' ideas went quicker than the trotting of any pony.

"I was just thinking that this would be an opportunity for you; because, after all, you can't have any illusions on the subject. You can only marry some one who is not quite like other girls——"

"But I have no intention of marrying again."

"That is absurd; you will have to marry, and your wife must be good-looking and well-born, because you are very particular. She must be serious-minded, self-sacrificing, and affectionate, for the sake of the children, and rich, because you are poor. What with poor Belle's debts and Linette's doctors, cures, and journeys you are almost cleaned out, poor old boy! And you know I can't leave you much. Don't think for one moment that any young girl with all these qualifications, and no reason for sacrificing herself, would accept you, with all your drawbacks. Fancy the life she would lead, between poor Linette and Jack, who is growing unbearable, and who will give you more trouble the older he grows. Only a woman who is handicapped in some way would make such a marriage. A few years in a convent are nothing compared to what might have happened to her, and you may think yourself lucky to get off with that. For if Henriette hadn't been a

nun, no one would venture to suggest her taking up such a task, and her mother would never give her consent, but as it is, things are just about even. She had a vocation early in life, and you have been married before; that makes the advantages and disadvantages equal, and such a marriage seems providential. What did our dear Henriette intend to devote her life to if not the care of children and sick people? And what are you in want of if not a sick-nurse and some one who will only live for the children? Now, look here, I'm going to say something which no one has thought of hitherto. . . . Those of the laïcized nuns who are young and rich have a perfect right to take up their lives again if they wish to, and they can not do better than marry widowers with children to support."

However much Jean might flog up his poor pony, he could not avoid hearing the theory with which M. des Vernières triumphantly clinched his argument.

"You don't think of making a love-match, I imagine; you know too well what that kind of thing leads to. In the present instance the matter is merely a question of making the best of things."

Before they reached home Jean had time to

begin day-dreaming. He saw once more the two fair heads in a halo of sunshine, one slightly bent as if beneath the memory of the veil which for so long had sheltered it from human eyes, the other stirred by every wild wind of folly, anger, or laughter. Neither Paula nor any of her kind would ever attract him again. One experience was enough, and even if he had the wish to ask such a woman to share his life, he had no longer the right to do so. More than his own future was at stake now. The woman he must marry (if indeed he ever made up his mind to such a thing again) must not only be his wife, but Linette's mother.

CHAPTER VI

THE LOURDES "EXPRESS"

"DON'T go upstairs, whoever you are!" shouted the Charteron girl from the bottom of the stairs, recognizing more convent visitors. "Aunt is in the shop—this way—". She pointed to the door opening into the court.

Mme. Le Hallier, picking her way, and tightly gathering her taffeta skirt around her, with a resigned but offended expression on her face, preceded Henriette through the dark back shop. She almost touched the dinner-table, and brushed the dirty drapery over the door dividing the two rooms with the aigrette in her bonnet. Finally she stopped for a moment behind the counter loaded with newspapers and pamphlets.

Sister St. Louis was trying to suit a customer, a workman who had probably just been next door, and was making the shop ring with ribald language, which the poor nun vainly endeavored to stop or drown. He calmed down at the sight of Henriette and her mother. Even if one has had a drop more than one can carry,

one is not so silly as to frighten away swells who are good for trade!

With this reflection he put down his sou on the counter, and made up his mind to go, throwing a last spiteful glance at the abashed and blushing Sister St. Louis.

"There's a pretty daisy for you, doing the proper at her age; if it's not enough to make you kill yourself laughing!" he called back from the pavement outside, after which the shop door closed, and Sister St. Louis gave a sigh of relief.

"It isn't always possible to keep rough men out of the shop. My sister-in-law is ill, and I didn't like to leave a young girl alone here," she explained, handing chairs. She grew more at ease as she sat down between her two visitors. "I must apologize—I did not expect the pleasure of seeing you. I thought you were settled in the country till late autumn."

"We are not intending to make any stay in Paris; we are only passing through, and leave to-night for Lourdes."

"Going to Lourdes! Oh, you are to be envied!"

She forgot all. The little, dark, airless shop, reeking of cheap printer's ink from vile newspapers, and full of tainted dust from tattered

books, the stained boards over which her poor swollen feet moved in ragged slippers, fatigue, misery, disgust—all were forgotten! The mere name of Lourdes was enough to call up magic visions. Before her mind's eye rose the picture popularized by devotional prints, so dear to the simple piety of devout souls; the Grotto, alive with candles like flowers of fire on their tall stems, blazing shrine of prayer and miracle; the Church of the Rosary stretching out mighty arms as if to embrace and draw the crowd of pilgrims to the triumphant white dome above. She saw the nave shimmering with banners, the Gave flowing past Our Lady's Rock, as some immense serpent coiling itself beneath the victorious feet of the Heavenly Apparition, while above all, the mountains stand like sentinels, guarding Her Kingdom.

She longed with her whole soul to behold such splendors. "Mon Dieu!" murmured the old nun; "I even used to regret our strict enclosure, when people spoke of going to Lourdes—and now that I am free to roam the world, I can not move for rheumatism! That is the way of the world!"

She laughed her old, innocent, quavering chuckle as she turned toward the young girl. "So you see one must not put things off while

they can still be done. You have youth and health—so make the most of both—particularly as one never knows nowadays when the Basilica may be closed."

"That's how Maman persuaded me to come."

"Your mother is right, as usual," remarked Sister St. Louis, doing her best to feel at ease with that lady. Madame Le Hallier was wonderfully kind and condescending, but every now and then she looked around, as if wondering how she came to be calling at such an extraordinary place.

They stopped talking as another customer came in—a clean-looking, little, fair-haired work-girl with innocent eyes.

"What can I show you, Mademoiselle?" asked Sister Charteron, dragging herself stiffly out of her chair.

"Half a dozen Faber's pens."

While the nun was counting the nibs, the young girl came nearer the counter and turned over one or two papers.

"Have you *Le Jesuite Rouge*?" she asked with an ingratiating smile.

"The *what*?"

"It is the sequel to *Les Mystères du Couvent*."

"I don't think so—I don't know——" stam-

mered the nun, wrapping up the pens with shaking fingers and thrusting them hastily on to her customer. "But it can't be a proper book—especially for you——"

"Now, then, just you show what you're asked for, will you? Don't you know where the things are kept by this time?" called an angry voice from behind the portière, as an ungainly looking youth came out of the back shop. He was tall and pale, and by his likeness to the girl, evidently her brother. But his features were sharper and more lined, and he had a very lowering, disagreeable expression, from which his sister's triviality was entirely absent. He went straight to one of the shelves, took down a series of illustrated paper books in numbers, and received the customer's gracefully tendered coppers, without once allowing his face to relax, even in response to the pretty girl's smile. When she had gone off with her parcel under her arm, he turned to his aunt with a villainous scowl. "I suppose business is so flourishing that you turn away custom, is that it? Well, if you can't be useful, the best thing you can do is to go back to your den upstairs, and at least leave other people to earn the money to keep you!"

Sister Charteron hung her head in silence;

she had heard such remarks before. But the insult flung at her before witnesses cut her to the heart, and her poor old face shook. There was more to come, however.

"Nice for idle gentry, too, to sit preaching in people's shops, preventing them from getting their living," snarled the boy, as he went into the back shop. He cast a comprehensive glance of malicious fury at the three women. The rich he hated out of sheer envy, and the poor one because there was nothing to be got out of her.

"Things aren't always as bad as this," said Sister Charteron in a low voice. Her remark may have applied equally to her business or family jars; her whole life seemed out of gear.

"It is rather hard to have to see and hear anything and everything," she began, "but," more courageously, "at my age nothing can hurt me, and one can try and get bad people to have better views of life, when one is brought so closely into contact with them." The thought of such an apostolate lit up the old face, that was more withered and wrinkled than ever, with an expression which obliterated ugliness, vulgarity, and even the passage of time. Virginal innocence still smiled on the lips of old age.

"My nephew has some good qualities," she went on to say; "he works hard, if anything too hard. His head has been turned, like many other boys of his class, by the things he learns, and by sitting up all night poring over books, in the desperate struggle to get on and pass examinations well. He hardly knows what he is trying for himself, but he wants to beat every other boy, at any rate. Then he gets furious when he sees that education isn't everything, and that there are plenty of obstacles in the way. He is always pursued by the idea that he is the victim of some kind of injustice, poor boy!"

Mme. Le Hallier listened to the stream of grievances with benevolent attention, here and there putting in some words of conventional wisdom. "The curse of the times—instruction without education—giving people tastes above their station, which can not be gratified——" But these considerations were trifles compared to her packing, and getting to the station, and from time to time she impatiently consulted her traveling watch in its leather bracelet.

Sister St. Louis, despite her politeness, was quite as ready to cut short the interview. It was no use seeing Henriette if they could not

speak of anything of real interest to both. During a free moment, while Mme. Le Hallier was directing the coachman, and the others stood waiting on the pavement, it was possible to approach the vital subject. "My dear child, have you any news of our Mother Ste. Hélène?"

"She wrote to me about six months ago, and I've heard nothing since."

"She wrote once to me, too."

"My letter was from a château in the country near Rheims; the family were just going to the seaside, taking her and her pupils. She was well, and had not forgotten us. That was all she said."

"Mine was about the same. Mon Dieu! I hope she isn't too miserable; perhaps things are better than we think, for of course she must be appreciated wherever she is. She is so clever and well educated that even for selfish motives people must value any one as useful." Sister St. Louis grew calmer as she reflected that her Superior was at least spared trials like her own. "But I am keeping you here getting sunstroke," she said, dropping Henriette's hand; "isn't this heat terrible! How delighted I am to think that you are going to the mountains and Reverend Mother to the sea!" With

these words she smilingly re-entered the stifling house.

"Poor woman, she makes one's heart bleed!" said Mme. Le Hallier as they drove toward the Avenue d'Antin. "From what we have seen, there's even worse behind."

"You don't think they really ill-treat her?" exclaimed Henriette, almost crying.

"Of course they do! What else do you expect of such horrible people; they only think of her as one more useless mouth to fill. Besides, at her age she must be a burden in some sense, wherever she is. Where should a miserable old woman in bad health, with no children, look for love and pity? The affection of a child is the only feeling that can be depended upon to comfort a mother's declining years, and nothing can replace it; I have proved it myself. You don't suppose I have the slightest illusions about Paula? If it were not for you, my old age would be desolate indeed. I don't wish my worst enemy such a fate, much less the person I love best on earth. I could not die in peace if I knew I was leaving you alone in the world." These last words were uttered in a whisper, which lost itself in the noise of the traffic. Henriette either did not, or would not, hear.

They only stopped at the house to pick up Paula, who had finished all their preparations, and was almost stamping with impatience as she stood waiting with her hat on, her kodak strapped across one shoulder. She had not been the first to suggest such a pious expedition, but she got so excited at the idea, and had so much to do with persuading her cousin to come, that Henriette and her aunt had not the heart to leave her behind. Always in extremes, she was now in a wild state of exultation.

"I've never seen any mountains. Jolly good idea to have thought of a journey, and what luck to find a place that suits Henriette!" she repeated, always ready to put her finger on the sore spot. Nothing that suited other people could of course be expected to suit Henriette. The latter, with the best will in the world, never seemed to fit into the family group. She seemed destined to be a creature apart, singled out by some unwritten law, which daily made itself more and more felt.

On the platform of the *Gare d'Orsay* the confusion of hurrying passengers and porters wheeling luggage turned her quite giddy, after being so long behind cloister walls.

As soon as the train was in, and the right

carriages coupled, her mother made her get into the compartment reserved for them.

"Make yourself comfortable in here while we get the boxes labeled. Heavens! what a crowd! What would it have been if we had waited for the Pilgrims' Train!"

The National Pilgrimage was starting next day, and Mme. Le Hallier, dreading the effect of enrolling Henriette among a crowd of religious enthusiasts, had made her daughter's comfort the pretext for going on ahead. A few other pilgrims, desirous of comparative privacy, had swelled the usual number of travelers by the *train de luxe*. This was to be followed by the usual train, so that modest second-class and shabby third-class passengers were also running about all over the subway platforms, two distinct classes mixing without fusion. Some were calmly getting ready, sure of a reserved seat, a fairly eatable dinner in the restaurant car, and a comparatively quick journey without too much fatigue; others loaded with parcels, a look of fatigue already on their faces, were anxiously watching for the stifling compartments where they were to be crowded during a long night broken by innumerable stoppages at small stations. With the unconscious interest in looking at people which Hen-

riette had felt ever since she left the convent, she took stock of the docile flock now being marshaled along by the first signal of the guard. White coifs from Anjou and Sain-tonge, Bordeaux shawls, straw hats on Paris work-girls, forage caps, soft felt hats and workmen's varied headgear, cheap suits of "dittoes," shabbily dressed mothers with bunches of children hanging onto them, going by cheap family tickets, guns and fishing-rods strapped to their owners' shoulders, the valise of the commercial traveler, milliners' band-boxes and countrywomen's baskets—all passed before her eyes. She remembered the picture which she had been accustomed to see yearly, the exodus of the poor and humble, going to their homes during the dead season in trade, or leaving Paris in search of a little health or amusement. But this year a new element was conspicuous in the familiar scene, a sign of the times. A stray cassock began to appear here and there, followed by a perfect army of Brothers in the midst of a crowd of excited young men, old pupils mustered together to say good-by to their masters. Then came a group of white cornettes, the staff of some dispersed school, and in the far distance Henriette saw the flutter of veils.

All over France, as on a field when the pack is started, was to be seen the same flight of white and black figures; inoffensive, proscribed, and hunted human beings, fleeing from pursuit. Even this train carried innumerable poor monks and nuns far from their empty convents, thrown on the world, some seeking refuge in houses of their Orders still kept open, others going to the Spanish frontier or to steamers leaving Panillac or Bordeaux, exiles uprooted from their native soil. The victims will never all be numbered.

Mme. Le Hallier and Paula joined Henriette at last. She felt that compared to the poor creatures she had watched she was not to be pitied; even love was not wanting in her life, and yet she envied those who were going. At least they would eventually find some convent, however far distant, where they would be received, with a Rule to guide them and, above all, a habit to wear, as witnesses of their pledge to God; while Henriette had lost all these safeguards. She felt herself a castaway, a rudderless soul, drifting out to sea, no harbor in sight and rocks ahead. She was roused from her reverie by Mme. Le Hallier.

"Look how Paula is enjoying herself!" she exclaimed.

Paula was standing by the corridor window, watching the crowd, drinking in the noise and life around her with the unconscious enjoyment of a child. Suddenly she turned around.

"There are the Des Vernières! They are getting into this train with Linette and the governess!" and Paula's hard expression suddenly reappeared.

"I bet you anything they are going to Lourdes, too. You must have known they were going, Aunt!"

"I? How should I have known?" Mme. Le Hallier put up her long eyeglasses and looked out, remarking as she sat down again, "I suppose Jean wanted to try Lourdes for his little girl, poor man! This pilgrimage may be the last that is allowed. They are right to get there ahead of the crowd."

The train started, and Mme. Le Hallier proceeded tranquilly to turn over the leaves of the time table, which Paula handed her sulkily.

But the glamor of travel no longer seemed to exist for the perverse girl. It was never easy to tell whether her fits of seriousness were mere sulks or not, but she took up a book and read until they reached Orleans, not deigning to look up or open her lips, till Jean and his father came to their door to pay their respects.

Of course M. des Vernières began explaining at once.

"I was quite surprised to see you; I did not think we were to have the pleasure of traveling by the same train. The other day when I told you our plans you said nothing of your own."

"How is Linette bearing the journey?" broke in Mme. Le Hallier quickly.

"Not badly, so far," answered Jean with a sigh. "It was she who wanted to come."

"Nonsense!" interrupted Paula.

"The other day when my father was talking about Lourdes, she said to me: 'Papa, I want to go there while people are still allowed to, even if I am ill on the way. Don't prevent me. I have so often been hurt to please you and the doctor, you might let me make myself ill for my own pleasure, just this once.' My poor little darling, whose only luxury is to be allowed to make herself ill for her own pleasure!"

He was obliged to stop to master himself. Presently he was as cold and calm as he had been at dinner a few nights before at St. Germier.

"Good heavens, how bored he is with us!" sneered Paula, as soon as he had gone. "No matter how much Aunt puts herself out to be

civil, it has no effect whatever. He was quite right to pretend not to hear when you offered to go and see Linette. I'll wager you he has gone without dinner to avoid meeting us in the restaurant-car, and he only asked where we were going to stay in Lourdes so as to make sure of not being in the same hotel."

"Well, and what business is it of yours?"

The blue eyes of aunt and niece flashed defiance at each other.

"Oh, it doesn't affect me in the least; I find him extraordinarily dull."

Night was now falling, and seemed to calm them all. First the red-gold head, and then the gray, began to nod with the swaying of the train, then they lay back for good. Henriette remained awake, watching the dark, shadowy landscape rushing past the window of the compartment. She did not feel inclined to sleep. She had left her capacity for dreamless rest behind her on her hard convent bed, and to-night she was pursued more relentlessly than usual by harassing thoughts, demons of the night assailing her poor tired brain.

Why was Jean near her again? Why this anguish at his proximity? Why did each one of their interviews disturb her more than the last? "Because he recalls the past," she avowed

frankly to herself at last. Those memories of the past which she had been able so long ago to live down seemed daily encroaching on her life. The rules she had tried to follow, at least in part, were always being altered to make way for other calls on her time. First she had had to give up the time-table so wisely planned for nuns by experts in spiritual training, and in the country even daily Mass had sometimes to be foregone. Even her prayer-time was interrupted and disturbed. She took from her traveling bag the breviary, which she hardly dared to open unless alone, and greedily, as one who tastes forbidden fruit, began to say her Office.

As she whispered, one by one, the sacred words, a mortal sadness crept over her. Where were the Sisters whose voices had so often mingled with her own? Mère Ste. Hélène and the others were far away; they did not write, and were gradually fading in the distance. All were in affliction!— Some, like Sister Charteron, had bitter ordeals to undergo, as well as the pangs of exile. Each had taken her book, and the dispersed choir nuns were all chanting, somewhere, the eternal words which gradually consoled Henriette. *Nisi Dominus custodient civitatem.* Yes, vain is all if the

Lord do not "keep the city" and sustain the home. Oh! the comfort of repeating the profound and soothing words. What matter decay and ruin? May not God have allowed earthly ravages, to make clear the path to glorious dwellings—a more abiding city? What matters the scattering of a few poor living stones, which the Master can gather together at His own good time and build up again to His glory? *Lauda Jerusalem.*

After the avowal of helplessness, the joy of divine succor. Henriette's heart grew lighter; it was lifted up to Heaven on the wings of the *Magnificat*: "The Lord hath regarded the lowliness of His handmaid." Once more the gates of the frescoed and gilded chapel are open; tapers burn, the scent of incense and roses fills the air, once more white-veiled figures in violet habits kneel in their stalls; the day of coercion and persecution is passed; the souls of the reunited nuns are filled with gratitude and happiness——

Her thanksgiving was cut short; she raised her eyes and the vision fled. Some one had roughly broken in upon her dream and awakened the sleepers.

"I'm sorry to disturb you," came the voice of old M. des Vernières at the door of the com-

partment, "but Linette is so ill that I came to fetch you without waiting to consult Jean."

In a moment Mme. Le Hallier was on her feet, wide awake, and with all her wits about her. She dived into her traveling bag. "You were quite right to come. I'll follow as soon as I have found my smelling-salts. Henriette, come too; not you, Paula, as you're not the least use."

The sleeping berths engaged by Jean were at the further end of the train, and as the three hurried along the corridor they could see the limp outlines of passengers sleeping under shaded lamps, reflected in the glass of their compartment windows like faded daguerreotypes. But where Linette was the lights were turned full on and the carriage in a state of commotion.

Jean started to his feet as they came in. He had always tried to keep everything about his invalid child as little painful as possible, and when she was dressed and arranged for the day she could even be admired for her dear little intelligent face; but now there was nothing to conceal her affliction. With thin arms twisted and face distorted with agony, her weak body writhing feebly in the instrument

of torture now plainly visible, she could be seen as she really was, a lamentable, pitiable creature, a cripple! Jean's pitying eyes involuntarily turned from his little daughter to see the impression made on the others, and he caught the look in Mme. Le Hallier's face as she murmured, "Poor child!"

But with Henriette there was no shadow of hesitation. On the contrary, she seemed instinctively drawn to the task before her. She bent over the improvised bed, and knelt down to get closer still to Linette. The golden head touched the livid, drawn face of the child, and her lips rested on the tear-wet cheeks. "Poor little darling, poor precious!" The words were not spoken in Henriette's quiet, calm voice; they were so full of yearning tenderness that Jean's heart thrilled at the sound, and the bitterest pang of his grief was assuaged. His child was more than a mere object of pity; others besides himself could think of her as something precious and lovable, and he no longer tried to refuse the proffered help.

"Henriette, I think something is wrong with the instrument— Just look; you will understand it better than I do——"

At last the paroxysm wore itself out. Linette fell asleep from exhaustion against

Henriette's shoulder, and they were left alone, so as not to disturb the child.

Minutes, half-hours, an hour slipped by. Henriette did not notice the weight of Linette on her cramped arm; she was quite unconscious of her uncomfortable position and of the stifling atmosphere of the closed compartment. She felt satisfied for the first time for so long, and so happy to think she had been able to soothe the little creature's pain. At any rate, she had not to watch her sufferings. But gradually this sense of joy gave way to other thoughts. A nun is accustomed to examine her conscience constantly, with the anxious scrutiny of one who will not tolerate one speck on that white surface; now that she was free to look into her motives she took the alarm. Had she performed her charitable action as in the convent; giving freely, bravely, disregarding fatigue and repugnance, secure in the quiet fulfilment of her duty? No; something more than ordinary humanity had moved her. An unknown ardor had filled her; the frail creature nestling in her arms had become dearer to her than anything else on earth. She would have given her very life for the child. It was too much; it frightened her. What fiber of her being had this stranger-child touched to life?

Oh, God! was there a snare set for her feet even on the path of charity?

Linette moved, and Henriette was able to disengage her arm; she was no longer indispensable, and, harassed by her own scruples, she left the compartment.

Jean was outside in the corridor. "What patience! What kindness!—" he was beginning——"

"Please don't thank me; that's nothing—She's going on all right now, thank God. Good night!"

She spoke breathlessly, oppressed by conflicting feelings.

"You are worn out; you can't deny it," Jean went on, still standing in front of her. It was past one o'clock in the morning, and he, too, was weary with his night-watch. "How can I thank you?" he repeated.

He forgot who they were—he, the cautious, self-controlled man; and taking his old playmate's gentle hand, which had ministered so tenderly to his sick child's need, he carried it to his lips.

Henriette returned to her place opposite Paula and Mme. Le Hallier, who were now dozing again, and sat down with eyes gazing straight before her, seeing nothing. How many

years, how many centuries ago, had she dreamed of what had now come to pass? A young man bending over a young girl's hand, and touching it with his lips. The man was Jean, the girl Henriette. Jean was still on earth, but Henriette had long since disappeared. The vision of the past had only recalled one of the vanished couple; what strange materialization, what diabolical phenomenon was this, which united a living man with a specter from another world? She took up her breviary once more, but the spell was broken. The sacred texts no longer touched her heart; she repeated them in a cadence, a lullaby by which she forced herself into a restless doze.

In this feverish half-sleep she lay till the train presently stopped in a huge station full of light and noise. Sonorous voices echoed under high white arches—"Bordeaux."

A few passengers alighted, but most people were going on to the Pyrenees. The arriving train, however, was invaded; half-empty compartments were suddenly filled, and sleepy travelers sulkily sat up to make room for the newcomers.

The Le Halliers' compartment was violently opened, doors were wrenched back, and the silk

shades pushed off the lamps. Their dazzled eyes just managed to make out in the half-light a great, lumbering, black-bearded man in light flannels, and behind him a crowd in the corridor. He looked all around the compartment, pulled down a window, and called the guard. He was followed by two women, one old and the other young, and a troop of shouting, elbowing children, who took up all the available space.

Mme. Le Hallier put on her most imposing air to repel such a horde of ill-bred intruders, but Henriette fancied herself still asleep and dreaming; surely the tall, thin figure in black, who brought up the rear, was part of some nightmare. She had no time to make sure whether she was awake or not, for the bearded invader, tired of talking, abruptly turned round and pushed his party out of the compartment again.

"They are going to put on another carriage purposely for us!" he shouted, to impress his hearers. "We are seven, and have a right to a compartment to ourselves." With that the barbarian horde disappeared and was lost in the general confusion.

Henriette had no means of discovering the identity of the figure she had seen in the dis-

tance. Doubtless by daylight she would be able to set her mind at rest.

The train rattled on southward. They were nearing the blue horizon, and the wonderful mountains of the miraculous shrine; soon the sun would rise over it. But Henriette forgot all that was in store for her, in her anxious conjectures, and her longing for daylight.

"Supposing I am right, and it *was* Mother Ste. Hélène!"

She gave up trying to sleep. Jean's image was already paling before that figure which had suddenly appeared as if in answer to the plea for divine help and guidance. She grew calmer. When her mother woke up, she smiled and declared herself not overtired.

"Neither am I," returned Mme. Le Hallier.

Apparently the most exhausted of the trio was Paula. Neither the dazzling sunlight on the smiling landscape, nor the enchanting vision of the Béarn country at dawn, seemed able to reawaken her enthusiasm. She hardly deigned to look at the Pyrenees. She had a headache, no doubt from having kept her hat on all night. She refused to remove it, and even pressed it down over her eyes, which looked strangely as if she had shed tears during the darkness.

CHAPTER VII

THE DRUAULTS

THE blinds of the Hotel du Rocher, the big hotel near the Grotto, had been pulled down; a wise precaution, not only for the sake of the pilgrims, who toward mid-day rested from their devotions and came in for meals, but also because a soothing half-light toned down the impossible paintings on the blotched walls, kept up a pleasing illusion with regard to the whiteness of the linen and the cleanliness of the crockery, checked the plague of flies, and, lastly, gave somewhat the air of a select restaurant to the coffee-room of quite an ordinary inn.

It was still empty. The first day of a pilgrimage every one lingers behind in the church or the Grotto, and only the most tepid pilgrims are punctual at meals. The first person to enter was a lady, followed by a man; the half-light was flattering to both. Tow-colored hair puffed out under a huge beflowered hat, a rustle of perfumed skirts, and too much jewelry (waist, neck, and ears sparkled and

the whole costume seemed to glitter), made up quite an attractive ensemble for the lady. The man looked youngish, with a dark mustache; he wore a light felt hat, light-colored clothes, and light gloves. Without hesitation the couple went straight to a table apparently reserved for them at one end of the room. The lady glanced at the looking-glass and patted her hair; the man, taking off his soft hat, showed a shining bald head with a network of very thin black hair carefully spread over it, the "last lock." Both were panting slightly.

"You are evidently quite done up, my poor old Ogo," remarked the lady acidly.

"Nothing of the kind," he answered, sitting up very stiffly and carefully, like a freshly cemented ornament. His spine seemed to straighten out, the muscles of his long, thin face tightened, the sudden glimpse of the real man, aged fifty, disappeared.

"It serves you right for dragging us here," pursued his companion spitefully.

"How can you talk such rubbish?" he exclaimed indignantly, "when I only asked to be left in peace at Royan! It was Druault who wanted to come here and be a stretcher-bearer."

"Do you think I allow myself to be driven

from pillar to post merely to please my husband?"

"Of course not! But the Abbess and your mother-in-law naturally jumped at the idea, and then the children must put their oar in——"

"Well, and couldn't they take care of themselves?"

"Never mind, the journey hasn't done you any harm. You are as fresh as a rose."

"I always look well."

Ogo flattered himself he had staved off a scene. Mme. Druault began to feel coquettish again, as she slowly pulled off her suède gloves, gradually exhibiting gold-encircled wrists and dazzling fingers. All her small person seemed to give out sparks of light; even the flowers of her hat showed glimpses of great shining pins.

She looked around in search of possible admirers, but, seeing the room empty, became cross again.

"What did you mean by telling me this place was always full?"

"Hang it all! Aren't there crowds enough for you? I haven't had room to move the whole morning, and it's only because we didn't wait for the sermon that we have found breathing space here. You'll see—in about five

minutes this place will be crammed. By the way, don't you think we ought to order lunch?"

But this diversion was as great a failure as the former. Mme. Druault looked a perfect cat; her wide puffs of hair on either side of her glittering eyes, and her heavily powdered little nose, completed the resemblance. Out came the claws.

"You're always just the same—always so cocksure about everything in the whole world—every one you meet is your cousin or an old school-fellow. You have only 'to say the word,' but you never say it! Always an excuse to get out of everything! You can't get one an invitation or even an introduction. One wouldn't think it would be so difficult, considering that you pose for being in smart society. After all, you are the Comte O'Gorney, and it would be very easy to make the kind of people acquainted who would be so delighted to know one another."

Mme. Druault showed her cards plainly by her emphasis on his title, and the unconscious irony with which she classed herself among people worth knowing.

"I daresay it sounds silly," pleaded Ogo, visibly uncomfortable, "but really this kind of

thing can't be done unless a suitable opportunity offers."

"But you let the opportunities slip—whether out of awkwardness or to make yourself disagreeable is best known to yourself."

"You can't really think——"

"Well, but it is as plain as a pikestaff!" Mme. Druault's voice was growing more and more shrill. "For instance, I asked you to introduce Colin de Cocheval to me—not that the old mummy is amusing, but his son is a Member of Parliament, his daughter gives parties, and they are good people to know. I am sure he has every reason to be civil to me after our taking his protégée off his hands! After all, it was he who sent us the Abbess, and we simply bought a pig in a poke on his sole recommendation. I think it was very decent of us, and you couldn't even make it your business to remind him of it."

"You can't always manage to get hold of a man at the head of a pilgrimage!"

"Rubbish! My husband, who is anything but brilliant, caught him this morning at the Piscina,¹ and he was quite charming. He immediately gave him the heaviest paralytic to

¹Bathing Pool at Lourdes.

carry. You should have seen Auguste showing off his biceps!"

"It's all right as long as he only carries off paralytics."

"I'm not the least anxious about his carrying off any one else."

The thought of M. Druault produced a slight yawn from the lady and her friend.

"Do let us order lunch," said that gentleman ingratiatingly; "when every one is here the waiters won't know where to turn, and we sha'n't get properly attended to."

"Trust you for boring one. Pass me the bill of fare. What a nuisance the others are, keeping us hanging about like this."

Meanwhile the room had filled. Families were sitting around tables, gray-bearded fathers, solemn, worn-looking mothers, simply dressed girls, and quiet-mannered young men. Couples faced each other at side-tables. Priests and ladies in mourning sat alone. A few foreigners gave a little variety to the aristocratic tranquillity of the assemblage, for the élite of the pilgrims went to the Hotel du Rocher. Mme. Druault watched them with pursed-up lips and eager eyes, while her attending gallant resumed the task his friends expected him to fulfil during three parts of

the year in return for his board and entertainment, the expensive amusements he could not forego, and the insults he so philosophically swallowed.

"O'Gorney, who is that tall scarecrow with the man with the red rosette?"

"The Marquise de Champreux, wife of the Privy Councillor."

"And the other man with the beard, opposite Cocheval?"

"That's the Armenian Patriarch."

"He's too absurd, with a beard like a river god."

"Not at all. He looks magnificent."

"Possibly. What is his mantle made of? And who's that well-bred looking woman with the two fair girls—one with her hair done so funnily?"

"Mme. Le Hallier, with her daughter and niece."

"Rich?"

"Yes, and in very good society. Old family, legal dignitaries, and so forth."

"I've seen them before, with the two men whom you introduced to me yesterday—for a wonder."

"My friends, the Des Vernières."

"Yes; by the way, the younger, the officer,

was married to an American, who caused a lot of talk, wasn't he?"

For the last three years Mme. Druault had been making use of O'Gorney as a kind of walking peerage and directory, but she had not yet succeeded in grasping different genealogies, relationships, and family connections; her feather-head would not contain all the complicated explanations of rank and precedence. She had neither the gift nor the training for remembering such things, and had never been able to forget that she had been born in the *Maison Rosine et Sœurs, Rue de la Paix*. No matter how hard she tried to imitate the great ladies who had dealt with her mother, the fashionable dressmaker, she had only got as far as reproducing the manners of the head floor-walker and the dresses of the lay figures. It was this drawback, more than her origin, which prevented her getting into society, and rankled daily and hourly in her mind. She greedily collected all the gossip she could find about any women with handles to their names (even the prefix "de"); and with this effort her worldly wisdom began and ended. However, she was disposed to be indulgent to the memory of the late Mme. Jean des Vernières.

"Why, for once in a way, your friends were

civil, and even polite. The father came and talked to me."

O'Gorney took advantage of this lull to unfold his napkin and examine the list of side dishes.

"Here comes my husband. I suppose he has just discovered that we have given him up."

Druault made quite a sensation in his white flannels and Russian-leather gaiters as he joined his wife and her friend with a confident smile.

"Abusing me, I suppose, eh? I know you have been kept waiting. Well, O'Gorney, starving, as usual? Fancy if you'd been working as hard as I have!"

"Do sit down," said Mme. Druault impatiently; her husband's huge figure entirely prevented her seeing anything else in the room. But he mistook the cause of her anxiety.

"Thanks, I'm not the least tired. But the number of people I've carried, one after the other! The other men were flabbergasted! 'Don't you feel anything? You must have double muscles like the man at Tarascon,' they kept saying. 'More like triple ones,' I answered. I really suppose I am something out of the common—I left them all gasping—by now they must be completely used up, and I

feel quite fit and ready to begin all over again. I've got more strength than I know what to do with; I must tire myself out somehow. What I should really like would be to chop up a load of firewood before lunch."

"Well, there's none here. Lunch is ready; I do wish you would sit down. What have you done with the children?"

"Don't worry, they'll all be here presently; I left them behind. They couldn't keep up with me and I couldn't dawdle about. Legs are like arms—they must be kept in training. I'm going up the mountain after lunch."

"Thank goodness, here they are!" cried Mme. Druault, as a heterogeneous party appeared. First came a tiny little boy dressed, English-fashion, in a tailor-made suit, with a very small girl in starched skirts, her curls tied back with a blue ribbon. Both children were affected and stiff, walking as if cut out of cardboard; their waxen little faces and fuzzy hair made them like nothing so much as a couple of dwarfs at a fair, or two dressed-up dolls. Behind them walked their elder sister, a girl of thirteen, as unlike them as she could possibly be, and frankly reproducing all her hereditary characteristics. There was no trace of the Rue de la Paix in Mademoiselle Druault; she was

unmistakably the child of the Montrouge factory, where her paternal forbears were still at work. Not all their amassed millions could alter the type. She was simply a raw-boned, large-featured, goggle-eyed parish schoolgirl, with a protruding chin and one skimpy black plait of hair tied with a red bow. Her appearance defied all efforts at improvement; and, as if she were not vulgar looking enough by nature, her clothes seemed to have been chosen to make matters worse. She wore a dress of Scotch plaid, a straw hat with a turned-up brim, and thread gloves, of which she was gnawing the fingers to keep herself in countenance as she came in. There was no mistaking the relationship between her and her grandmother Druault, who followed. Red-faced, round-backed, of the unmistakable cook type, the old woman waddled in, hanging on the arm of a tall, thin, peculiar-looking person in black. The family party, now complete, walked around the table before sitting down, the father once or twice bodily removing a fidgety child from one place to another, the figure in black standing by until all were seated.

"You might have brought the children back punctually," remarked Mme. Druault, junior, in her most acid tones.

"Where's my bag?" quavered the old lady anxiously. "Oh, you've got it—all right—take care of it, my dear."

People at adjoining tables glanced at the strange group with well-bred but unmistakable surprise, while a faint blush covered the sallow cheeks of the descendant of the Kings of Ireland. But nothing disturbed the composure of the lady in black, who sat like the personification of renouncement and possibly had no personal pride left. Yet ever since her entry she had kept her eyes turned away from the side of the room where the Le Hallier party were, and now sat with her back toward them. But Henriette recognized her and suddenly rose from her seat, leaving her mother no time to remonstrate.

"What is the matter? Who is she going to speak to?" exclaimed Mme. Le Hallier, as Henriette went up to the Druaults' table. In her surprise she turned to Paula, but the young girl, who had just been laughing cheerfully at Monsieur Druault, answered in a cross, abrupt voice:

"She is talking to that worthy person in black—evidently a secularized nun, one of her old companions. You didn't expect such a meeting, Aunt, I suppose."

Henriette was face to face with the fleeting apparition of the night, and once more in touch with the past. Mme. Van Stilmont's stern face melted as they clasped hands. They were all they had ever been to each other. This was what Henriette wished to proclaim publicly, with no shadow of hesitation or delay, and it was clear that Mme. Van Stilmont appreciated the girl's victory over natural shyness, for she smiled again, though evidently disinclined to prolong the interview. Speech seemed difficult to both, under the fire of so many inquisitive eyes.

"We shall see each other again, my child," said Mme. Van Stilmont in a few moments; "I am going down to the Grotto to-morrow, after the seven o'clock Mass. Could you meet me there?"

"Yes."

"Very well, then; that is understood. Good-by till to-morrow."

Leaving Henriette to return to her mother, she quietly sat down again in the chair, which all the others had avoided, next to old Madame Druault. In the early days of her engagement as governess the late Superior of the Annunciation had aroused a certain amount of more or less offensive curiosity, which, as she

did not appear to notice it, had died a natural death; but this fresh incident revived the old feelings. They were freely expressed; why should one stand on ceremony with a paid dependent? Old Mme. Druault, who held the purse-strings, considered herself privileged.

"I say, my dear, is that one of your——"

"Late flock," whispered O'Gorney, who, partly out of exasperation and partly to oblige her, had fallen into the habit of finishing the old lady's sentences. "If all your scattered lambs are like this one," he continued, with the sneer which always came naturally to his lips when speaking to the Abbess, "you will find some difficulty in getting them back to the fold."

But she affected, as usual, not to hear. She was stoically patient with the senile and constant demands of old Madame Druault and the vulgar impertinence of the rest of the family, but her eye had its coldest and most searching rebuke for Comte O'Gorney. She was the only one in his present entourage whose social extraction enabled her to take in the full extent of his ignominious position; she judged him by inflexible laws of conscience, and he, feeling this intuitively, and wounded in what little pride remained to him, hated her accordingly.

"I'll wager you what you like," he pursued, "that this girl is delighted, in the bottom of her heart, to have escaped from your rod." The ivory features remained unruffled. "I will go farther," he continued, on his mettle; "I will bet you that she is thinking of anything but the convent. Cover your face, I happen to know that she has at least one flirtation on hand, because it is with a friend of mine."

"I know whom you mean!" cried out young Mme. Druault. "I know the man, too, don't I? I'll go halves in the bet, Ogo."

"They are always two to one," shouted Monsieur Druault good-naturedly, "but I won't have you teased like that, poor Madame, particularly at table. It puts one off one's feed, and you weren't eating anything to speak of to start with. Sapristi! I hope you won't be shy; we didn't engage you to put you on Carmelite fare. It wouldn't suit me at all, with my strength to keep up."

"Oh! I'm strong, too," declared Mme. Van Stilmont, with her mysterious smile. "Please God, I shall have strength enough for what I have still to do!"

"Ah, but you don't use your strength. You take it easy," explained Monsieur Druault. "You don't go climbing mountains and carry-

ing paralytics about afterward by way of taking a rest!" As he rose from the table he complacently surveyed his red-leather covered legs and the pair of prize-fighters' wrists which emerged from his mauve shirt-cuffs.

While the children were still squabbling over the plans for the rest of the day, he started shouting at them. "Off with you!" he cried. "I suppose you don't want to come, O'Gorney; you are most confoundedly lazy, I must say. You only care for lolling about in the carriage with my wife. I'm going to take the brats to see the dog I bought this morning; pure Pyrenean, just like a little bear. He's awfully bad-tempered though; he won't stand having his tail pulled like my poor old Rovigo."

"But I won't have him—I forbid you to bring such a brute into my house!" protested old Mme. Druault, anxious to show who was mistress.

"All right, Mother, he shan't hurt you. When you're about in the daytime he shall be chained up, and when you're in by-and-by, he will take care of the place. If any one tries to sneak your chestnuts, he'll tear him to pieces."

"Ah, that would be useful," she mumbled, half convinced. "Just look, my dear, and see if you can find——"

"Your bag? It's on your arm," finished O'Gorney, sitting down opposite Mme. Druault junior with a sigh of fatigue, as the rest of the party moved away.

"Well, did you see?" she asked, twitching with rage, and pointing first to the Le Halliers' table and then to the Abbess's vacant chair.

"See what?"

"She knows them, and didn't even suggest introducing them to me. A woman living in my house! That is a little too much."

Mme. Druault got up to leave in her turn, throwing down her napkin.

"I must say I don't think much of the manners of these swells," she said, on purpose to be overheard by Cocheval and the Patriarch.

Henriette had been waiting in front of the Grotto for more than an hour, motionless in the midst of the stream of people which had been flowing between the churches, the Piscina, and the Rock since the day before. By the light of moonbeams shining on the mountain, and beneath the star-strewn sky, many of those who came from towns or from more sophisticated northern districts found themselves suddenly in a world of nature and mysticism com-

bined, and were carried along in the fulfilment of their ideals.

After the early morning Masses in the shadowy sanctuaries, where the dim lights of distant tapers shone here and there on the golden case of some *Ex Voto*, these girls and women had gone to finish their prayers to the sound of the murmuring stream; kneeling on the soft grass and watching the gradual coming of a mystic light of dawn over the holy spot on which they were. The night had passed in an ecstasy, which still shone in the eyes of tired worshipers, and these had already begun valiantly to muster to the sound of morning bells announcing the coming of another day, one of those terrible July days when the thermometer rises to unheard-of figures.

But Henriette looked in vain among the passers-by for the friend she so longed to see, and for whose coming she had hardly dared to hope.

"Perhaps they won't let her come," she said to herself anxiously at last. For her own part, it was difficult enough to escape from her mother's guardianship, but what was that watchful care, so kindly and discreetly exercised, compared to the brutal slavery weighing on the other, on the woman who had been re-

vered and obeyed in all the prestige of her spiritual dignity? Henriette could hardly take in the facts of the case, and what her mother and Jean himself had managed unavoidably to convey to her of the peculiarities of the Druault household, still haunted her like some impossible nightmare. Sœur Charteron's troubles were little compared to this. Here was something worse even than the spectacle of weakness, age, and gentleness being victimized, and she felt ashamed of having to watch the degradation of what had been so deeply revered. The ordeal was harder for the Superior of the Annunciation than it would have been for any other woman. Her spiritual side had always been so predominant that her daughters forgot almost that she, like others, was dependent on the necessities of life. How could she possibly make such concessions merely to gain her daily bread?

But Henriette's perplexities ceased to trouble her, as she saw through the blinding dust of the Boulevard the unmistakable outline of Mère Ste. Hélène in her reincarnation.

"She will explain that with everything else."

The same impulse as both had felt on meeting the day before drew them together.

"Dear Mother!"

"My dear child!"

Once together they seemed to take up the thread of the past, though with restrained emotion in the embarrassment of such a public meeting. They waited until they had passed the groups standing by the Grotto.

"Excuse my delay. I am not quite free," began Mme. Van Stilmont in her restful voice, and with her habitual Old World politeness. When Henriette began to get accustomed to the sight of her outward transformation, there was the fresh surprise of her being absolutely unaltered. "Have I changed?" the girl asked herself introspectively. They proceeded along the Boulevard, avoiding the crowd—solitary pilgrims paid no attention to them. Henriette took Mère Ste. Hélène's arm, pressing it in a kind of distress.

"Oh, Mother! at last I can speak to you. It was time; I don't know what will become of me, so far away from you!" The tears coursed down her cheeks, and torn between conflicting feelings, she turned her eyes to Mme. Van Stilmont, with her worn, thin face and shabby clothes.

"And you, Mother, you are so unhappy, too! Why can't we bear our grief together? Why can't I——" She stopped, and bending

quickly, raised to her lips the thin white hand which lay on the old black dress.

Mme. Van Stilmont smiled calmly.

"I beg of you not to grieve for me, my child," she said. "What does it signify where we are or what we do, so long as we are serving God? There is the only true happiness; and to-day I have in addition the unhopèd-for joy of seeing you again——"

"But for such a short time!"

"Short indeed——"

With her well-remembered gesture Mère Ste. Hélène felt for the nickel watch which was attached to her narrow chest by a black cord. "I can give you only half an hour; we must make the most of it." She closed the poor long-handled parasol, her constant companion, and sat down on one of the seats in the shade along the street, motioning to Henriette, who had remained standing, to sit beside her. "My child, tell me at once all you wish to say."

There was a sudden calm and lull in Henriette's troubled mental atmosphere; the cloister was about her once more and the world shut out. She felt the influence of religious obedience, and in all docility opened her heart.

"Mother, I am unhappy and ill at ease. I mistrust myself and I fear my own powers of resistance."

"There is nothing strange in that, my child. Are not doubt and temptation the common lot—and particularly liable to overtake those like ourselves, whom God is trying, by turning us aside out of our appointed path?"

"But I feel the trial in a special degree——"

"You do? Well, all the better, since you have the courage and resignation necessary to bear it."

"But suppose I have not?"

Henriette hung her head at this avowal; Mère Ste. Hélène looked up energetically.

"What are you afraid of?"

"Uselessness. It frightens me to think of living as I do, of no use to any one, forever deprived of my task in this world. Can it be right to submit to this, can it be God's will, when He has commanded us not to waste our lives?"

"We do not waste our lives when we suffer."

"But if it is useless suffering?"

Mère Ste. Hélène's eyes shone in their hollow orbits, her stern profile against the background of southern landscape and blue sky looking as impassable and calm as when

she beheld only the white walls of her cloister.

“What is our vocation?” she continued; “it is to suffer for the love of God and the salvation of souls. We sought it in solitude, renouncement, and death to the world. God has willed that we should find it elsewhere. He refuses the offered sacrifice, and exacts a greater. To go back to the world is harder than it was to leave it; let us give up our own wills generously. We have given ourselves to the salvation of souls by prayer; God asks us now to work for them. Let us put our whole hearts into the task. There are ignorant and neglected souls, souls exposed to temptation, souls whose misery and danger is unsuspected by the world, and for whom no special mission exists; the self-sacrifice of individuals alone can help them. This is the apostolate for disbanded workers, gleaners of the harvest such as we are. God will put these souls in our way, and when we have found them we must not forsake them. What matter if men scoff or are surprised at us, as long as we are faithful to our task, helping the salvation of others, giving them all we have left to give, all that is left to us, little though it may be, a tiny coin of our alms, be it only a word which may recall

them from the brink of a precipice, or an example that a child may remember all his life long!"

"Ah!" exclaimed Henriette involuntarily, "you are staying where you are for the sake of the children."

Mme. Van Stilmont did not choose to answer.

"Let us speak of you, dear child!"

"I—have no such consolations. It would be a new life, a joy to me, to be able to devote myself to any one; but my sacrifice seems worse than useless, even harmful in some cases. Paula told me that my very presence makes her unhappy and spiteful, and, as for others, there is danger to myself in that direction."

Henriette spoke these last words in a very low voice, and Mme. Van Stilmont looked again intently at her.

"But you have your mother——"

"Yes, her love makes me suffer more than anything else in my life. She adores me, but humanly, for the sake of keeping me near her, and not yielding me to God. It is her revenge for the time when God's will won the victory. I shall never alter her, she will not give way, and I begin to fear—to fear—that I myself shall yield——"

She paled, as if the struggle were hard and defeat very near, and turning to her Superior, she cried, "It is you I need to defend me. Keep me near you!"

Mère Ste. Hélène would not yield to the cry of distress.

"You know that is impossible, my poor little girl; besides, I am nothing and no one now." There was a mystic joy to her in this self-abasement, and she again rose to heights where Henriette could not follow her for long.

"You are still as dear as ever to me, my child. I am still the mother of you all; I feel your sorrows, and tremble at your dangers. But you must no longer look to me to direct your lives. God has taken that heavy responsibility from my shoulders, doubtless that I may the better prepare myself to meet Him at His judgment-seat, and because it is best so for your sakes. Neither I nor the cloister can protect you; you only can keep yourself for God now."

"I still belong to Him," protested Henriette.

"*Ecce Ancilla Domini*," murmured Mère Ste. Hélène.

"*Fiat mihi*— But what is His will? Don't leave me without at least telling me what you think it is!"

The Superior rose.

"Put your hand on your heart," she said slowly. "What sacrifices are you prepared to make? What lengths will your desire for immolation go?" The ecstasy of the martyr lit up her worn face, and Henriette closed her eyes as one who grows dizzy when the mountain-tops rise higher and higher.

"I don't know," she said, seeing that Mme. Van Stilmont still waited for her answer. "I am so unhappy already; with a guide and helper I could be strong, but solitude crushes me!"

Mme. Van Stilmont did not answer; she allowed no disappointment to appear, but, with one of her abrupt descents into realities, merely remarked:

"It is nearly ten o'clock; they will be waiting for me," and began to walk back.

The few moments of intimate and long-desired communion were already drawing to their close, and Henriette felt painfully aware that she had not drawn from it all the hope and courage she had expected. Mère Ste. Hélène had made her realize more clearly than ever that the break with the past was final. The past had been blessed indeed, full of rest and sweetness, when her soul, upheld by another,

could aspire unimpeded to God; now her guide was forsaking her, and she could no longer clearly see her way.

"We shall meet again, shall we not?" she asked, timidly breaking silence. A vague gesture was the only reply, and Henriette, afraid of seeming persistent, walked on with downcast eyes, watching the last steps of the way they would tread together. In a few moments they would mingle with the ever-moving crowd, now surging again in front of the Grotto.

Then Mme. Van Stilmont stopped and put her slender, transparent hand, still adorned with the ring of her mystic espousals, on the girl's shoulder. Henriette trembled as one more memory of the past came over her. When one of her nuns had confessed to a fault or a moment of hesitation in old days, the Superior would remain silent for a short time, as if in thought, and then with a few brief, illuminating words point out what the culprit had perhaps ignored or dreaded to recognize. This was what Henriette feared to hear.

"My child," said Mère Ste. Hélène gravely, "you can not return to your former life, and you do not wish to put up with your present one. Are you thinking of an altogether new and different existence?"

Henriette could not deny that this was exactly what she felt.

"Well, then, if marriage can fulfil your ideal, remember you are dispensed from your vows. You are free!"

The hand resting on Henriette's shoulder was withdrawn and the deep, intent look faded. The girl felt support giving way beneath her, as if something were broken and ended. Mme. Van Stilmont had smiled at her once more, but differently, as one smiles at a stranger, and was already walking away with her long, easy stride. Henriette followed.

"Mother!"

Mme. Van Stilmont made a sign to check her, and she suddenly realized the ordinary surroundings of life. A few steps away stood Mme. Le Hallier, watching intently and trying to catch what had passed, as they came toward her. Others, too, were near, as a brutal reminder from the outer world that the sacred moments of privacy were over. All the Druaults were standing in a ring around an enormous Pyrenean dog, which served as an excuse for drawing all eyes to themselves and their belongings.

"He's jolly strong, I can tell you; it takes my tidy old grip to hold him!" shouted Mon-

sieur Druault. He was wearing his everlasting red-leather gaiters and shaking a chain that would have held a bear, hoping to make an impression on Henriette as she passed.

O'Gorney's seamed face was twisted into a sneer, Mme. Druault's icon-like masses of jewelry sparkled in the sun, the children grinned, and the grandmother wagged her old head and swung her bag backward and forward.

As Henriette walked away she saw Mme. Van Stilmont join the group with whom it was her fate to be associated, and knew she was powerless to help her. It hurt the girl so much more than even their first parting, when the Superior's future destiny was still undecided, that she was on the point of turning back. But an unknown and agonizing pang of uncertainty and doubt wrung her own heart. Would they meet to-morrow—or ever again? Mme. Van Stilmont had not looked around. Henriette could not, even from a distance, make her a last gesture of farewell, nor receive any sign or look in return. But she was not spared the sound of Mme. Druault's piercing tones as that lady began scolding her governess.

"So you have turned up at last! Now take the children indoors; they're in fits of fright at

this horrible brute. Tell the porters to bring down the boxes—we're off after lunch."

Henriette had rejoined her mother, and Mme. Le Hallier drew her away with an instinctive movement of possession, clinging to her, and speaking in a trembling voice, her eyes full of tears.

"What a time you've been! I was getting quite anxious, and I was so bored and dull. I get so miserable without you, dear, now that I'm accustomed to have you back again, and you keep me so happy. There's only one thing wanting—to see you contented again; but I shall bring it about— You'll see—"

She was jealous of that other Mother, who still had so much influence over her daughter; she was trying to rival her, and to show the difference between a spiritual tie and all that human love and care can do. The contrast shook every nerve in Henriette. New impressions began to mingle with her old ideas. How beautiful to have a real mother, when every one else had forsaken her! Such love is sacred! Why refuse to yield, now no other duty was in conflict? Why not take her mother's advice? She had no other.

"You are free!" Mme. Van Stilmont's last

words rang in Henriette's ears, and in spite of her mother's hurry to get away she turned back once more.

But the governess of the Druault children had obeyed orders, and was taking her pupils indoors. Her thin, shabby black figure had already begun to fade into the distance, and the last glimpse of her showed her bending over her refractory charges. The landscape was brilliant, and through the hot air and beneath the blinding glare of the sky, silver river, green mountains, white churches, and blazing shrine made a background for the agitated crowds; kneeling, praying, singing, a stream of humanity overflowing with supernatural life. But Henriette saw nothing. A black figure, every moment less sharply defined against the clear horizon, was gradually disappearing forever. Was she only a ghost of the past or an Angel Guardian? Was Henriette forsaken or set free?

CHAPTER VIII

DEFENSELESS

A VERY marked difference became apparent among the pilgrims from the second day. Some kept up the first fervor of piety. They lived in a higher world, absorbed soul and body in prayer and contemplation, carried out of themselves by the sight of churches always full of incense and canticles, the voice of the preachers above the heads of the crowd, and glimpses of mitred bishops and vested priests. Before their eyes passed lines of white-veiled girls, immense processions of the faithful winding around green slopes, like cohorts of the blessed in a sunlit paradise of green fields. At night the illuminations turned darkness into supernatural daylight in the holy city and traced in fiery lines the triumphant outline of the Basilica above the miraculous rock. Others, early satisfied with mysticism, soon chafed at the narrow limits of the little world of ideals and began to look beyond it. They inquired about ordinary health resorts and springs, and longed for fashionable promenades and cele-

brated excursions. Guide-books and maps began to make their appearance, and parties were made up for short expeditions. By the third day an absolute stampede set in. The morning trains took rustic crowds to Pau or Tarbes, under the guidance of their parish-priests, while landaus, coaches, and motors plowed up the roads.

Paula could no longer maintain the sulky indifference which she had kept up during the last forty-eight hours.

"Are we leaving to-morrow without even having been up the mountain?" she asked angrily.

Madame Le Hallier, who was sitting in the hotel garden with the Des Vernières, received the inquiry coldly.

"I've seen so many mountains in my time, dear child, and I'm so tired of them."

"And Henriette would so feel missing one single *Oremus*," added Paula. "And you, Monsieur Jean, you don't take any interest in anything either—"

"Oh, yes, I do, Mademoiselle. I take an interest in Linette, who is going to be put in the water again presently."

This snub from Jean was so unexpected that Paula was taken aback, and he himself was

surprised to find that such trifles could disturb his usual equanimity. His father saw fit to intervene.

"Well, now, perhaps we can manage to please all parties. Mademoiselle Henriette, perfection as usual, will be only too happy to keep her mother company. Jean wants no one but Linette, and Linette wants no one but her father, but Mademoiselle Paula and I are useless, even rather in the way (now don't protest), so may we take advantage of our liberty?"

His fertile brain had thought of a plan on the spot.

"My friends, the Champreux, are going to start presently for Argelès, and I'm sure they would be only too glad to take us. Will you give your permission, dear Madame? Will this suit you, Mademoiselle Paula? I will just pop over and see them."

Paula was going to check him, but thought better of it. She looked defiantly toward her smiling aunt and the still offended Jean.

"I hope their nephew is going," she said; "otherwise an excursion with a Fellow of the Institute, after a pilgrimage—" She shrugged her shoulders lightly, adding an expressive ges-

ture no longer condemned by modern standards.

"You may rest content; you'll be able to get up a flirtation," said M. des Vernières, determined to be equally up to date. "It would be a very good speculation to flirt with a nice young fellow who will one day inherit a fortune from his uncle."

Paula burst out laughing. "Of course you must have a project in hand! But I don't think much of this idea."

"Why? Such marriages take place every day."

"What, when the lady has only a plantation in Madagascar for her *dot*, and uncultivated at that! The greatest miracle of Lourdes! *Mon Dieu!* What joy to spend twenty-four hours with people who won't be shocked at me! Come along, *cher Monsieur*; I will get ready while you go and tell the *Champreux*."

She ran in quickly, proud of being free to do as she liked, and as Henriette followed, Mme. Le Hallier went indoors after them.

Jean remained behind, alone in the hotel garden, a piece of waste ground where nothing had a chance to grow. Trees died, grass shriveled up, and the gardeners had barely time to roll

the gravel constantly roughened by the feet of visitors from every corner of the globe. He walked up and down the narrow paths, smoking furiously, and talking almost audibly to himself. "The girl is insufferable—silly, selfish, conceited. It's rather funny, though," he reflected, "because she didn't seem likely to turn out like this. Last year I noticed her nice way with my father and the children. I thought under all her little peculiarities there was some heart or natural feeling, but there's nothing. She's changed, though. I wonder why?" He took a step forward and stopped again. "Perhaps it's only childish nonsense," he said to himself, but the phrase somehow seemed an echo. When or where had he said something like it before? Eight years ago—when he determined not to be put off by the caprice and extravagance of a girl as young and pretty as Paula! He went over again in his mind the painful surprises and humiliations his optimism had cost him, and the disgrace which threatened his home before death intervened. A cigarette lay smoldering on the path where he had thrown it down. Jean stamped on it angrily, as if he had a grudge against the little flame which refused to be extinguished. He was absorbed in his own thoughts again when

his father returned, out of breath, but more lively than ever.

"I've settled everything. We shall be an even number. We sleep at Argelès, and tomorrow make the trip around the valley; but I've no idea what time we shall get back here. Is Mademoiselle Paula ready? Mme. Champreux is waiting outside in her carriage."

Jean and the Le Halliers came out to see them off. Paula had recovered her gaiety, thanks, no doubt, to the presence of young Champreux. Her short traveling skirt and hat veiled in white gauze gave her a little touch of style which she did her best to exaggerate. She took a hurried farewell of her aunt and cousin, whom she would see soon, but the Des Vernières were leaving Lourdes next evening.

"You will probably come back late, and I shan't have the pleasure of seeing you again here," said Jean; "so this is good-by, Mademoiselle Paula."

"Yes." Paula's musical voice was hoarse, and took on a singular inflection as she half whispered, "If only I could hear, when I come back, that Linette was cured!" Through the thick, shiny gauze of her veil Jean fancied that her lips were trembling and that tears were very near, but he was mistaken, for she began to laugh and

started to lay the foundations for her flirtation. "Where's my bag?" as that old imbecile kept saying in the funicular train yesterday," she called to young Champreux. "You imitated her awfully well. We must cultivate your talents on the way."

"Capital idea!" said old Des Vernières from the small seat, where he was feeling excessively juvenile under the green lining of his sun-umbrella.

They were off.

"How lucky they are to have nothing to think of but their own amusement!" said Mme. Le Hallier, after a short silence.

"It's quite natural at Paula's age," observed Henriette.

"Age has nothing to do with it, my dear child. When you were much younger than Paula you were serious-minded, always thinking of others, and never of your own pleasures. In sixty years' time, if she is spared so long, Paula will be just as frivolous as she is now. Nothing alters nature. Now your father, Jean, is exactly the same as ever."

"Exactly," repeated Jean, who could not deny it.

The fourth day of the pilgrimage was a con-

trast to the three dazzling ones, and dawned in a gray, depressing atmosphere. The mountain-tops were wreathed in mist and rain-clouds hung suspended over the head of the crowds, whose energy had begun to flag. They had lost their first curiosity and ardor and that indomitable spirit of hope which storms the very gates of Heaven. Amazing cures had happened the first day, but none since. Were all the reserves of Divine Mercy exhausted? Some among the pilgrims were weary of fruitless suspense, others convinced by what they had already seen. The people did not press so closely around the pools and were more apathetic in their prayers and supplications. Most of the invalids and cripples still waiting motionless in their wheeled chairs, or prostrate on stretchers, had already been bathed in the miraculous waters without any results, and their attitude, like those of their friends, told plainly of the insoluble riddle which had saddened and perplexed them. Divine favors were accorded to some and withheld from others. Why?

Jean brought his little daughter as usual to the reserved bath, gave her into Henriette's charge, and left them. Until now he had waited outside while Linette was being bathed,

schooling himself against the vision of her walking out cured, and determined to smile and cheer her when she should be carried to him. In his heart of hearts he had still hoped from day to day. But there was to be no to-morrow; they were leaving that night. The miraculous remedy was being applied for the last time, and he had not the courage to wait while Linette's fate hung in the balance. Yet he could not go back to the hotel—he was on tenter-hooks.

Jean was beginning to realize that he, as much as Linette, perhaps even more, had hoped with the blind trust which men stake on their last resource; he had counted on a miracle because nothing less could avail. He stopped in front of the Grotto. Was he in any way responsible? he asked himself solemnly. The idea of being responsible for Linette's affliction cut him to the very heart. Yet, as he watched her martyrdom, he accused himself of having indirectly caused it. If, when he married, he had remembered those who might be born of him, he would have made sure that all was well, in every sense, with the woman who might be their mother. If he had not allied himself to a family so threatened with hereditary disease, he would not now have a crippled

child, cut off from all chance of happiness in this life. God only could do away with the effects of such imprudence, and it was for Jean to implore His mercy. He felt as if Linette's recovery depended on the fervor of his prayers and the state of his own soul; he fell on his knees before the now closed iron railings, fixing his eyes on the thousands of crutches hanging from the rocky vault and the sticks whose handles, blackened with time and use, shone in the light of burning tapers. These simple objects took on an air of mystery and venerable dignity, as do the rags of a nation's flag when it hangs from the walls from some dead soldier's monument. These, too, were the trophies of victory. Here science and reason had bowed before the Divine Will, but who could say what moved such supernatural intervention? What claims had they to a miraculous healing—all the innumerable pilgrims who had left these perpetual commemorations of their affliction and its cure? They could not have been more innocent than Linette? Did even the helpless, crippled child deserve more who, the first day, at the passing of the Blessed Sacrament, rose to his feet, threw away his crutches, and followed the procession between his parents, who were sobbing with joy?

"Am I the obstacle?" Jean asked himself, his head bowed to the very earth. He was past caring whether his presence or attitude attracted attention; at Lourdes people pay no attention to what their neighbors are doing. He felt that some one was beside him, but hardly noticed that he was no longer alone. He was absorbed in searching his conscience, and fathoms deep in conjectures which seemed to lead to nowhere. A woman's stifled sob reached his ear, but did not rouse him. Some poor creature was suffering and praying as he was, but millions of others had prayed on the same spot; and prayer always unseals the fountain of our tears. Nothing short of a voice directly addressing him, speaking close to his ear, could have brought him down to earth. It seemed the answer to his thoughts.

"You are praying for your daughter?" He turned, and in his confusion fancied for one moment it was Paula, with an expression in her eyes he had seen there once, but not lately—not for a year. The eyes which drew his to them were bright and haughty, but the delicate, withered face under the white fold of a widow's bonnet was that of Mme. Le Hallier. She seemed shaken to the depths of her nature, and

before Jean could speak she broke out violently:

"I, too, am praying for my daughter, and if my prayers are unanswered, yours ought not to be granted, either; it would be too unjust!"

Both rose, and Mme. Le Hallier went on repeating wildly, while the bewildered young man faced her in amazement:

"You suffer because your child is different from others. My grief is akin to yours, but it has gone on longer, and I owe it to you!"

"To *me!*"

Another sob broke from under the veil she had pulled down, and Jean allowed her to put her arm in his and lead him away. He had known her ever since he could remember anything. He had seen her in her full meridian, a brilliant, obstinate, domineering woman, afterward embittered and soured by sorrow, now softened by the return of her daughter, but never anything but self-possessed to the verge of coldness, or even pomposity; and this sudden revelation of an unknown, unsuspected Mme. Le Hallier foreboded strange surprises to come.

A few steps away from the Grotto, and beyond the range of inquisitive eyes, she wiped

her eyes and unveiled her face, now flushed and revived by the intensity of her emotion.

"Don't you understand?"

"No, Madame," he answered, but his voice faltered; he had a sudden presentiment of what was coming.

The gray clouds overhead hung lower and lower and the air was full of languid heat. The birds were already twittering and beginning their night song, which the river Gave always accompanied with a low, melancholy undercurrent of sound. Madame Le Hallier took the path which Mère Ste. Hélène and Sister St. Gabriel had taken, and sat on the seat where they had sat.

"Jean, I must tell you all, now I have once begun. Afterward you must judge for yourself, and act as you choose. Come what may, I shall have done my duty as a mother!"

She stopped, in evident distress.

"Why don't you help me? You must understand what I mean."

"I swear I don't!"

"Absurd. You guessed the truth when Henriette became a nun."

"No," he answered emphatically; "never in those days."

"And now?"

"I understand what you mean, but I don't believe it. It would make me too unhappy."

"Nevertheless, it is true."

They hesitated before tearing the veil from reality. Thoughts are less brutal than words.

At last Jean began to speak hurriedly.

"How was it possible? I did nothing to bring it about; of that I give you my most sacred word of honor. I only showed her the respect, the affection, the admiration which she inspired, and still does, in me; and all I saw was friendship, such as she is sweet enough to feel for me still. Why should I have thought of anything more? I have never been a vain man, and if I was to blame in anything that has happened, I was in absolute ignorance, because I should never have dared to believe what you imply."

"Still, whether you intended it or not, you spoiled her life and mine. She was all I had in the world, and you took her from me."

The steely eyes shot lightnings at Jean. "For eight years she was lost to me; I was childless, as I thought, forever; it took what I hardly dare call a miracle to bring her back, and even now she is not really mine. I feel about her as you do about Linette. She is there, and smiles at me, and calls me Maman!

I have a daughter, yet I am not a mother like others, because my child is not as other daughters are. She does not live as others do; she is outside all ordinary hopes and fears, outside our common life——”

“Ah, forgive me!” murmured Jean.

“There is not even a resemblance to her former self,” continued Mme. Le Hallier. “Do you remember her the year before your wedding, when you used to come to St. Germier on leave and play tennis on the lawn with her? Muslin dresses were the fashion then; she had them in all colors, blue, white, and pink, and she always put a fresh one on when you were coming. She would do her hair differently on purpose—do you remember the fair waves that made her look like one of Fra Angelico’s angels?”

“She was only too like them, even then,” said Jean, “and that deceived me.”

“No, it was not that. But you were young, and the young are selfish and follow what glitters and attracts them, forgetting all else. They can only see one thing at a time.”

“Yes, that’s true,” he admitted.

The memory of their happy past, their youth together, the lovely fair curls long ago fallen

beneath the cloister shears, came back to him with the knowledge that all this had gone out of his life forever.

"I, too, was blind," pursued Mme. Le Hallier bitterly, "and my mistake lay in not believing that you could really be in ignorance. She was so naïve, and showed her preference so plainly, poor little girl! I saw it at once; *mon Dieu!* how pleased I was! You seemed so likely to make her happy, and what could I ask more? As for money, I had plenty for you both. But I did think the question of means kept you back, and that is how I explained to myself your delay in proposing. I never doubted your intentions, because you still came to the house, and so I let things go on until she had given her heart too utterly to you to be happy without you. That kind of girl, too, like the angels, as you say, has not the consolations of other women. She does not 'flirt,' she falls in love, and such innocent love knows but one alternative to fruition—the convent. There she can either fly from the thought of her lover or remain eternally faithful to his memory." Beneath the tears which were blinding Mme. Le Hallier all resemblance to Paula had disappeared. She disappeared, too, from the confused vortex of Jean's thoughts,

and in her place arose the gentle image of the lost Henriette.

"I know what you are saying to yourself," continued Mme. Le Hallier; "you are thinking that not only did you bring grief upon two women, but you missed your own chances of happiness."

"I don't deny it."

The clouds had dropped till they nearly touched the mountain-tops. The river moaned plaintively in the heavy atmosphere. The landscape seemed wrapped in a vague mist, which shut out everything from their eyes. A deep sadness, a feeling of remorse for wrong so unwittingly done, weighed on Jean.

"You should have told me!" The words were out before he could check them.

"When? After you were engaged to marry another girl or while my daughter was still a nun?"

He was dumb. Mme. Le Hallier had brought him to the point, and she now became definite.

"Even this is, in a sense, a betrayal of my daughter's confidence; at least, I had to wait till it could do any good, and until you were in a position to be able to repair the past and do your duty."

As Jean suddenly realized that he had been entrapped, his first instinct was to recoil; then his heart softened. Why should he care so much what happened? He owed his life to no one; he was running no risks now at any rate. The solemn landscape with its grottoes and fountains, its churches echoing with the ceaseless clamor of prayer, exhaled in its very air mystic theories of expiation and abnegation, which the world refuses to recognize. The holy spot, where sin and punishment are linked to miraculous answers from Heaven, seemed the true country of Christian souls. Between Linette's affliction and the lamenting of this half-bereaved mother some affinity seemed to exist. Jean felt a superstitious pity, mixed with a wholly human tenderness, driving him toward Henriette. In the past his father, with heavy-handed common-sense, had put things bluntly and turned his son's thoughts away from her; then by degrees she seemed to have attracted Jean again, and was now a beneficent and beloved friend, with a halo of poetic renunciation about her virginal head. So the girl who had a nun's true vocation, the secularized Sister thrown out of her real orbit, was but a victim of human love after all! To repulse her again was a fresh responsibility, and his

nature as man refused to take such an arrogant attitude. Mme. Le Hallier had foreseen all this.

"I don't want to influence you," she said, starting to walk back as the rain began to fall in large, slow drops. "Let this conversation remain between ourselves. I shall not allude to it again. It is for you to make up your mind."

"One word. I have always felt the greatest respect and admiration for her, now more than ever. I feel what she has suffered."

"Let us bury the past. Instead of dwelling on what she has suffered, think how happy she could still make you."

"Do you really believe that she would marry me now?" he asked, yielding to irresistible curiosity and to a strange fascination.

Madame Le Hallier turned to the young man as he followed her. "I don't know. What I do know is, that no one else would ever have the slightest chance with her, or else why should I put ideas into your head which other men have had and may have again? Who would not be attracted by her beauty and grace and her sweet disposition? And you don't know her as she will be when love has transformed her! That is what I want to see

before I die; she loved you once, and I asked myself why she should not love you again. That is my only chance of keeping her near me in the world; my one thought is how to keep her, so I am not making myself out better than I am. You took her from me, and you are the only man who can give her back to me. On that condition only can I give you the forgiveness you asked of me just now."

The raindrops were now falling quickly; a heavy shower was imminent. Mme. Le Halier hailed a cab, hurried into it, and as Jean was closing the door she said quickly: "I shall never tell her what I have done to-day, and I can trust you never to let her find it out."

After she had driven away Jean still stood where she left him, battling with the thoughts she had raised. This latest complication in his life was so unexpected that he could as yet hardly disentangle his own impressions. It was so long since he had given up any hope of love; he had so few illusions, and hope had so long forsaken him! Worn out and tired of arguing with himself, he could only think of the peace of resting in the arms of a faithful and loving wife.

The pilgrims were hurrying through the rain, besieging street-cars, forming regiments

of umbrellas along the pavement, and hurrying across the road under the feet of the spirited little Pyrenean horses, who were trotting briskly through the shower. Jean walked quickly in the direction of the private hotel where he was staying till the evening. Just as he reached it he heard the blast of a coach-horn at the top of one of the hilly roads, and a four-in-hand drove recklessly down the steep descent into the crowd, amidst peals of laughter from a party of young people on the roof. The inside passengers did not seem so comfortable. Jean perceived the grotesque, palsied profile of old Mme. Druault at one of the windows, and at another a white head much resembling that of his father.

So he had not been mistaken when a few moments ago he fancied he recognized the delicate little face peeping out from a red hood somewhere in the front of the coach! Paula had started with the Champreux and was coming back with O'Gorney and the Druaults.

"They can't even behave decently out-of-doors!" he reflected angrily; Mme. Le Halier herself could not have been more horrified.

When he got in, his father, who had just

arrived, seemed enchanted with his twenty-four hours' trip.

"Glorious country, my boy! Superb weather, pleasant traveling companions, and not a single mishap from first to last; on the contrary, nothing but strokes of luck. The Champreux wished to stay at Cauterets, and as I had promised to join you here, the Druaults, whom we met, offered to bring us back. By George, they drove at a pace! The coachman had finished all the champagne left from the picnic."

"So you picnicked together?"

"I thought it would amuse Paula. I really didn't know what to do with her," confessed old Des Vernières. "You know I thought she had her eye on young Champreux; well, I assure you, he found it pure waste of time to try and flirt with her. She was in a vile temper and capricious beyond words. It is no joke to chaperone her, I can tell you! She nearly made us break our necks among the mountains, and it is a wonder to me that she wasn't killed herself with the mad things she attempted. At last I decided that moral dangers were less alarming, but she didn't run any great risks in that direction. Mme. Druault may be a little too go-ahead, but the grand-

mother and the children make up for it, and the governess, who is a secularized nun, was a splendid make-weight."

Linette, lying stretched out in the little sitting-room full of trunks and parcels, paid but little attention to her grandfather's conversation; she kept her little hot hand in that of her father, squeezing it from time to time.

"Are we going to-night, Papa?" she asked.

"Yes, darling, it's quite settled."

"Oh!"

She felt they had given up the idea of a miraculous cure, with all the other hopeless attempts to help her, and her face was so full of pain that it nearly broke Jean's heart to look at her. It was the saddest departure imaginable; the little inert body was carried through the rain and the darkness from the house into the carriage, and lifted from the carriage into the railway station.

When Linette was safely deposited on the sofa of the waiting-room, she roused herself for a moment from her lethargy.

"Mademoiselle Henriette promised to come and say good-by to me at the station. Is she coming?"

Jean asked himself the same question; the idea of seeing Henriette agitated him, and

when she came in with her mother he could neither look nor speak with his accustomed calm. When he discovered this he walked away in silence, his eyes following every movement of the quiet figure moving gently among such commonplace surroundings. Other women walked about the station, but none had Henriette's supple grace nor her sweet, pure face. Why should such a woman not inspire an enduring love? Why should he not love her? He thought of his conversation with Mme. Le Hallier, and said to himself, "I missed my life's happiness."

The idea that perhaps he had a chance of being happy, after all, presented itself; a feeling, more like feverish curiosity than anything else, made him draw near to Henriette and speak to her once more, though his throat was dry with agitation.

"Although we are not traveling back together, as we came, Henriette, I shall soon see you again at St. Germier."

"Yes, we shall be there in two days."

"I don't like to thank you for all you have done for Linette, because you begged me not to——"

"That's nothing. But I'm very sad now, Jean."

"Why?"

"Because she has not been cured," said Henriette, in a trembling voice. "I had hoped such great things for her, and for you, my poor Jean, but God willed it otherwise. He must have other designs on her."

"Perhaps."

In speaking of Linette they had drawn nearer each other, and Jean, looking deep into Henriette's sweet, pensive eyes, saw a flame in their depths. Was it love? he asked himself. Again the strange, irresistible curiosity overpowered even his prudence.

"Sometimes," he whispered, "after we have lost our way, God leads us to happiness by unexpected paths."

Mlle. Le Hallier's eyelids fell, and with a half-frightened movement she walked back to Linette. Jean followed her, not daring to say more.

"Linette," he said, turning to his daughter, "your prayers were not answered as you wished, my darling, but you were right to come; perhaps you have obtained something else!"

CHAPTER IX

AN AWAKENING

EACH of the guests had the same impression on arriving. They stopped short at the turn of the avenue, from whence could be seen little tables gaily decked and set out under the trees, and then hurried on with cheerful alacrity. People had so often come of late years to St. Germier to be bored for politeness' sake; now perhaps they were really going to be amused. All the same, a great change had come to the place, a kind of convalescence, a fresh phase, an awakening; and there was something of hesitation and languor about the whole business. The servants, quite out of practice, moved slowly about their duties; Mme. Le Hallier, after her long, revengeful sequestration, showed what it cost her to play the genial hostess again, and to appear natural among her friends; and Henriette, in her white dress, with her great dreamy eyes, had the surprised look of the Sleeping Beauty newly awakened. The guests themselves were stiff and embarrassed, and the very air, full of

September sunshine, seemed to pass tentatively and apologetically through the red and golden foliage of the old trees in the park. Spring would have been too joyous, summer too ardent; the serenity of autumn exactly suited such a resurrection.

For Jean also it was a kind of mental convalescence; it was the first time since his wife's death that he had been at any large function, and he let himself be soothed by the pleasant sunshine of the waning season. He was in his right atmosphere. Already a second stage in his life had begun; peace was replacing active happiness, and he asked for nothing better than such rest in the years to come. But yet he had never realized more vividly that his youth had been short, and that it was gone forever!

Thanks to the time of year, the masculine element was well represented; youths home from college and military training-schools came with their families, and hosts from neighboring chateaux had brought men in their house-parties. Jean picked out a boy from St. Cyr among the heterogeneous crowd by his walk; and noticed that though only a faint pencil-mark on his upper lip did duty for a military mustache, he had lost no time in violently flirting with Paula. Under cover of handing cups

of tea, Jean watched them, suddenly conscious of an illusion. The couple were Henriette and himself, before the days of sword or cloister. How few years had passed, and yet so much joy and hope were dead! It was sad to watch the eternal wheel of destiny gradually turning to show new beginnings, while he was but a spectator.

"I had no time to love her really. It was too soon, and now perhaps it is too late. But she loved me; does she love me still?" For the thousandth time he asked himself the question, and the answer was never twice the same. Either Mme. Le Hallier, or perhaps he himself, had unintentionally made Henriette self-conscious; he noticed the difference in her manner, and how she blushed whenever he came near her. But she did not attempt to avoid him, and they talked quite naturally of the things which had drawn them together since Lourdes, such as the children and Linette's health.

"Would you believe," put in old Des Vernières, "that Linette wanted to come? She takes after her grandpapa, and likes society."

"Because she never sees any one," said Jean with a sigh; "if she knew what so-called society is, it wouldn't attract her so much."

"Nonsense!" said the unabashed Des Vernières. "I don't see why you shouldn't have brought her. If you haven't many illusions left, the best thing is to help others to get what pleasure they can out of life, and forget your own little worries."

"But it's not easy to forget!" murmured Henriette.

Mlle. Doncet, a little black, crooked silhouette among the brilliant summer dresses, came limping up, and passed them in a flutter.

"Too many people for me—I'm off!"

"Quite right," said old Des Vernières with his usual delightful lightheartedness; "she's out of place here."

After the old maid's departure there was nothing to spoil the brilliant picture. Flowery vistas, vivid green grass, autumn-tinted leaves, glittering china and silver on many-colored table-cloths, champagne bubbles seen through glass, pink and white ices, and the dazzling discs of parasols, made one of the color-symphonies so dear to painters of to-day, and already reproduced in those tapestries which will give the last touch of modernity to our houses, and will eventually banish from them all the mysterious charm of dark, solemn fabrics with an intangible spirit of gentle melan-

choly woven into their tender, faded colors, their dark-branched Flemish-looking trees, and their golden threads. Color triumphs in the luminous "*plein-air*" of our modern landscapes; spirituality has faded away; and this new art is a true symbol of our materialistic epoch, given up to sensuous gratifications. The party assembled at St. Germer were of their day, half permeated and wholly intoxicated by prosperity and luxury. With unconscious and rather brutal directness of aim they followed their natural attraction. Young and old broke up into groups to flirt and gossip, each to their taste. Paula's voice and laugh rang out, gradually rousing the hesitating guests to cheerful chatter, which only quieted down near the shady corner instinctively chosen by Henriette.

Mme. Le Hallier had not lost sight of her for a single moment. These few hours of relaxation for others were to the mother a prolongation of her perpetual struggle; and the serene and majestic hostess was raging within herself against many of the guests. Why did they put on an air of prim decorum to speak to Henriette, and change their manner directly after, as though nothing but boredom or an awkward gravity and restraint could be her natural atmosphere? No young people of

Henriette's own age attempted to claim her, and she seemed loth to join them. Standing in her white gown against a background of green leaves, she looked like a marble saint whose effigy the passers-by admire and venerate on their way to some center of life and reality. Paula was surrounded; Paula had taken Henriette's place! It is true that the younger girl had been made the pretext for the party, which had been ostensibly given to amuse her and introduce her to eligible young men. But now she was in the way and was really doing harm. How dared she walk about doing the honors, audaciously looking up at people with her dazzling blue eyes, like some beautiful living flower in her fresh bloom, while her aunt stood by and ate her heart out with impotent rage?

"I must really congratulate you on your niece!" old Des Vernières came up to say. "Beautiful, of course, she always is, but I never saw her in such a charming humor. She certainly can be irresistible when she chooses, and if she makes up her mind to get my poor old Jean back to tennis he will be hard put to it to refuse."

Mme. Le Hallier turned quickly toward the lawn, where Jean was standing in a group of

eager players, and saw Paula coming to his rescue, racquet in hand. Apparently she made some remark to which he responded by shaking his head; the young girl, without arguing the point, walked quickly away, with elbows tightly pressed to her sides, while he strolled back to Henriette's shady nook. After that, Mme. Le Hallier ceased watching and waiting; any quantity of balls might roll over the lawn where other players had stood eight years ago; now she was able to devote herself to her guests and to discover how useful and charming they were. She could even enjoy herself, with the thought in her mind of what the day might help to bring about.

All the visitors went away about the same time, just before dusk, but their presence left behind it a vibration in the air, a kind of magnetic current through the ordinary atmosphere, which kept up the excitement of the afternoon. Paula went into the drawing-room and sat down to play a wild cake-walk; her brain no doubt was whirling with the images of imaginary dancers, but her real audience reduced itself to old M. Des Vernières, who at seventy-five was still delighted with such tunes.

Mme. Le Hallier was less accommodating. She took Henriette and Jean into the library,

remarking, "Don't let us go any farther; we shall be deafened. Jean, you will stay and dine, won't you? That's settled, then, but if you want to get back sooner because of the children I will have dinner early." She disappeared through the heavy portière, a wonderful Persian fabric, as quiet in tone and dignified-looking as were all the other exquisite objects with which the room was almost overcrowded; antique furniture, authentic curios, and priceless books accumulated for centuries in the quiet old prosperous bourgeois home.

The last gleams of the setting sun shone on the tarnished gold of picture-frames and were reflected in the glass doors of bookcases, while the dark draperies and somber woodwork of the rest of the room was almost in darkness. Henriette in her light gown looked more frail and slender than ever as she leaned back in a great armchair. She seemed years younger than her age, almost a child; and again Jean's feeling of illusion shut out the present.

"I was so pleased to see you in a white dress again, like in old days," he said, leaning against the mantelpiece and gazing down at her. Henriette stroked the silky stuff.

"It reminds me of the habit I wore so long."

He chafed at the suggestion; why did she break the charm so soon? He tried again.

"What do you call 'so long,' Henriette?"

"Six years; seven, with my novitiate."

"Do you call that much out of a lifetime?"

"It was my youth."

"Youth is not everything."

From the next room came the sound of the noisy dance, still being violently executed with an iron touch, as unlike as possible to Paula's usually delicate and supple playing. There was a certain talent in her way of handling the barbarous stuff; her own disturbed and tempestuous soul seemed passing into the music.

"But you see," continued Jean, "we must be careful not to allow the symbols of certain things to overpower us with their significance." He glanced down again at Henriette's white dress. "I speak from experience. For instance, when I wrote the letter resigning my commission, I had not a moment's hesitation; I knew it was the only possible course to take; I was only too glad to be able to make my sacrifice with dignity, and my fellow-officers were more moved than I was. But the terrible moment was when I took off my uniform for the last time! Then I really did feel humili-

ated and as if my whole identity were obliterated. I could not imagine ever being of any use again in civilian clothes!"

Before her mind's eye rose the vision of an empty cell in the Rue de Grenelle, and a nun's habit lying in it, the deserted grave-clothes of Sister St. Gabriel, whose very soul seemed dead to-day compared to the spiritual energy of those days.

"And do you know," he continued, "when I managed at last to overcome that impression? It sounds silly to say such a thing—but it was only when the polling-day for our borough came around, and we managed to oust the Municipal Internationalists in favor of honest men, true Frenchmen. However small the victory, it was for the honor of France, and I felt I could still serve my country. Now I cling to the mayoral scarf,¹ though the emblem is rather ridiculous and not particularly romantic, but the colors are those of the flag, after all!"

Mme. Le Hallier showed no signs of returning. Henriette seemed to hang on Jean's words, and he began to realize that a long-expected crisis was at hand.

"I suppose," he went on, "that the best and

¹The Mayor's insignia is a tricolor sash.—TRANSLATOR'S NOTE.

wisest thing in this world is to make the best of life, after we have been prevented from spending it as we wish."

"Yes, when it is only a question of a career, or of certain special circumstances, such as environment, habit, et cetera. But supposing one is asked to alter one's very self, to go against one's very instincts, and to abjure the inviolable——" Henriette left the sentence unfinished, as if she were not quite certain herself what the best answer would be.

"And supposing," answered Jean, in a tentative voice, "supposing circumstances make such a breach of the past not only a duty, but a necessity?"

In the half-light Henriette's face had become an indistinct oval among her vaporous golden curls, but there was lassitude and disappointment in the downward movement of her head as she listened to Jean's last phrase.

"No one has a right to live a useless life," he said gravely.

"Surely you know that no day passes without my reminding myself of that? Don't you know that I would give anything to get out of the idleness which is sapping my energies and paralyzing all my impulses?" replied the girl with unexpected fire.

"I did not mean to be personal, Henriette; you must know that. Although I am a very old friend, I do not presume to question your future plans."

"It would not be very indiscreet, for I have no plans."

"Really? Does nothing appeal to you?"

She let him go on speaking, as though, tired of questioning him in vain, she was simply curious to hear what some one else thought of her case.

"Yet sometimes I have fancied I saw an interest awaking in you——"

"What?" she cried abruptly.

"An interest in children."

"Yes, that is true; I love children," she frankly admitted. He had really touched a chord in her heart. "Especially orphans, the sick, or the afflicted."

"Like my little girl?"

"Yes, Jean, afflicted children such as Linette."

"What makes your heart go out to them?"

Henriette hesitated. "I don't know," she said at last.

"I know. May I try and explain you to yourself? You love children because you are a woman. Ah, Henriette, don't turn away,

don't think me disrespectful. You 'chose the better part,' we know, but as your choice has been forcibly altered, can you not still do good, and please God, by resigning yourself to an ordinary existence? I dare hardly tell you what happiness it is still in your power to give."

They were both silent, and the air seemed heavy with fate.

"Just now," resumed Jean in an altered voice, "you said that suffering attracted you, and that encourages me to speak. There is much unhappiness in my home, Henriette. The child's affliction is plain to all, the father's sorrow may be imagined; but there is more behind, and I am not ashamed to reveal it to you. I mean the grief of a lonely man with sad memories, regrets, even remorse, for I am not altogether free from blame. I was thoughtless, and failed to see where my true happiness lay. But my only chance of happiness is where it always was! I ask myself, and I ask you, if the past can ever be repaired."

The white figure facing him in the dim light remained motionless. Henriette neither repelled nor encouraged him. At last her voice came to him, almost in a whisper.

"Do you really think it would make you happy now?"

"Yes, Henriette."

"I do not—besides, for me it is different. You know that this world can no longer offer me any real joys."

At last the slow ossification of cloister life had ceased its work. The mold of compression had broken and flown into fragments, and the living woman stood revealed as even weaker and less sure of herself than her sisters in the world. The cloistered soul had grown upward toward God like some tall plant tapering to the sky; now it was bent back, and it swayed in the hurricane of earthly sorrows and struggles.

"I sacrificed all to God; how can I take anything back? And if I did take back my gift, how could either of us ever forget what I have been?"

"You are seeing things out of proportion," said Jean, with a faint smile. "You have nothing to forget, my poor little girl. It is I who have to ask forgetfulness of the past."

The music in the next room stopped. M. des Vernières could be heard exclaiming, "Bravo," with a slight tendency to an Italian accent, which, however, was evidently not a

success, for the door closed sharply behind some one leaving the drawing-room.

"Paula has gone—all the better," remarked Jean unconsciously, his whole thoughts concentrated on what Henriette was saying. At the beginning of their conversation he had only anticipated being able to feel his way gradually toward inaccessible ground, but suddenly the sealed soul had opened before him with such spontaneous frankness that he was carried away himself.

"Jean, let me confide in you! I feel it would be the only right, true thing to do. Remember that we nuns have got out of the habit of petty social rules. I admit that my life is irretrievably spoiled. I must start afresh in some way, and I am free. No scruple of conscience could oppose any change I desired to make. But I feel, even while you are suggesting it, that marriage would be impossible. The more it is put to me as a rational, feasible, permissible step, the more repulsion and dread I feel."

"Have you a personal antipathy to me, Henriette?"

Darkness had fallen. Henriette pressed the knob of the electric light and the shaded pink lamps in the ceiling shed a brilliant light on her face, showing up the play of every feature.

"You want to see how far I will trust you. If I decided to marry, I would marry you rather than any other man. But I must not think of marriage at all."

He noticed that she no longer said, "I can not think of it."

"But you admit that you have no scruples of conscience," persisted Jean.

"Not toward God, but toward you."

"Henriette, I love you as you are; I only ask you to let me love you."

His heart felt very tender toward her; such innocent trust was a proof that she still loved him, and turned to him in her hour of weakness and uncertainty.

"Let me take care of you," he said, as his hand instinctively sought hers; but Henriette withdrew it irresolutely.

Before Jean's eyes flashed a sudden memory of a day and a moment like the present. At the same hour, after tea, he had been alone with Mabel. A stream of sun poured through the window, where a pink thorn-bush thrust its branches over the wall, and he had been suddenly carried away, to find himself whispering, instead of the commonplace phrases of a passing flirtation, words which decided his fate. He remembered the "beauty" listening, rigid

with amazement at such real passion coming into her conventional existence. Then he had looked deep into the glorious black eyes and watched golden points of light turning to fire, and Mabel had leaned on his shoulder, offering her lips for their first kiss, conquered, ready to give herself without one thought of worldly prudence or calculation, all the primitive instincts of her race stirring in her heart. Disappointment had come, owing in some part to the unrestrained nature of a woman whose soul went for very little in her impulses, but at any rate that hour had been true. It had been as real and living as the spray of pink thorn at the window, tender messenger of spring, although that blossom, too, had faded and died after its hour of beauty had passed. The memory of those moments came back in strange contrast with the present. Things of the soul were too present with Jean and Henriette for him to try and stop her scruples with something more than reasoning, or than even tender words. But he would not let himself be rebuffed.

“I understand what is saddening and keeping you back; let me try and explain it to you. When we have really known the meaning of youth (for it is not given to every one to be

really young), when we have, for some cause or another, watched our ideals and our illusions fade, or seen them destroyed—a kind of widowhood comes to the heart, which nothing can quite obliterate. You wear the willow for the ideal to which you so generously gave yourself, body and soul. I am neither surprised nor jealous. I respect you all the more for your fidelity, but would you not find your best consolation in lightening the burdens of those who grieve as you do? Henriette, I am alone in the world, and my two little children are orphans.”

She covered her face and wept. Her tears were all human, and Jean did not try to check them. Suddenly, with an abrupt movement, she dried her eyes and spoke to him.

“Jean, I must think. I can’t say more now; I have already said too much; I can’t believe that we have come to this.” She struggled for control. “Whatever comes, I am grateful, and I don’t regret having confided in you.”

She held out her little hand frankly, as a friend (the hand she had refused to let him hold as a lover), and went on speaking in her ordinary voice.

“I will go and dress for dinner; no one need know of this at present except Maman. I can

not hide anything from her; besides, she is sure to guess!"

When Jean found himself alone, he felt strangely unhinged; the very suddenness of the situation agitated him. His proposal had been met simply and frankly, but it must have consequences, and in any case he had not offended her. He always felt at home in this room, sacred to so many past generations of workers; he knew he was a welcome guest, and vague thoughts of being master one day at St. Germier came into his mind.

"But that idea never came to me before; no such considerations have ever influenced me," he told himself, while his face burned. He had certainly felt anxious about the future when the American millions had melted away in wild-cat speculations, and his own modest patrimony had been frittered away in his father's silly schemes. But he thought little of himself; his children, especially poor little Linette, must be provided for, and he could not shut out the thought that Henriette (in every sense) might be their earthly providence; no good father could keep from such reflections at a moment so decisive. A man who has only himself to take care of has the right to be as distinterested and high-minded as he chooses, but even deli-

cacy must sometimes be sacrificed when other people's happiness is at stake. A proof of what parents will do on behalf of their children was not long coming. Mme. Le Hallier lifted up the portière, hurriedly asking: "You've seen her; well?"

The mother had been watching for her daughter to come out, and now hurried to hear how things had gone. Jean could not keep her in suspense.

"I've spoken."

"Did she refuse?"

"Not definitely."

"Then she accepted!" With an abrupt movement Mme. Le Hallier took the young man in her arms and kissed him. "Oh, Jean! You'll give her back to me! You don't know what a mother I will be to you!"

He was moved to the heart. This was love—love shining in eyes worn and dim with tears, love in every tone of her voice. The old woman had been a true, complete woman; she had loved, and her maternity was still a passion, living and fruitful, born of the ashes of past fires. If youth and love could ever be revived for Jean and Henriette it would be her work, and he felt her influence wrapping him around on every side.

When they came to dinner she had strewn the cloth with flowers, heavy perfumed blossoms fit for festivals of joy, innocent Bengal roses, brilliant crimson blossoms, slender, languid, yellow tea-rose buds, all breathing of love. She had slyly ordered the old Sèvres dinner-service to be used, with beautiful pieces of antique family plate. It seemed quite a domestic group. M. Des Vernières, with his majestic white beard, faced Mme. Le Hallier, while the others talked even more cheerfully than usual, to drown their own preoccupations. Paula was quite in her element; one day's amusement was always enough to turn her never very steady head.

"I should love to live like this always, with no time to breathe—people coming in and out, and wheels rolling all the time— Oh, the sound of carriage wheels! Who's coming? Every one gets excited; a tremendous surprise is expected, and of course nothing happens. The most awful bores get out, and one longs to shut them in again, but at any rate there is always the glorious moment before the door opens."

"With your disposition, Mademoiselle," said old Des Vernières, "I advise you to keep to that view of life."

"Do you?"

"I know you; you only care for new faces."

"And even more for people I've never seen!" cried Paula in fits of laughter.

"That is not very flattering to old friends," observed Jean.

"Oh, I've no use for old friends. It takes time and perseverance to make them. By the time I was three Papa had trundled me from Algeria to Cairo and from Cairo to Smyrna, and I shall go further afield yet. I make new friends all along the road as I go; they never see me again, and forget all about me. Each one to his fate. I am the eternal *passante*! Henriette, in *her* way, forsakes her friends, too, but she knows where to find them again. She is a ghost come back to the world."

Mme. Le Hallier bit her lip to keep back a rejoinder, which the bold mouth, smiling so provokingly, would certainly have capped with something worse. Only the gentle, dreamy voice of Henriette broke the silence.

"It's true. I am a ghost."

"Just like the ghost in '*Robert Le Diable*,'" put in old Des Vernières— "Let me see, what's the great air? Wait a minute—oh, yes; '*Nonnes qui reposez!*'"

Fortunately, his memory carried him no fur-

ther, but he soon strayed off in equally perilous directions. "Don't I hear wheels? Visitors, Mademoiselle Paula. The Prince Charming is coming to run away with you——"

"No!" she answered with cold impertinence; "that's only an old cab. When I go, a motor-car will fetch me, and of the most swagger make, too, I can tell you, or I shan't get in. The journey of life is quite boring enough; the least one can do is to make sure of being comfortable on the way." Her eyes grew hard, perhaps with envy.

"Oh," thought Jean to himself, "so she is mercenary; I never knew that before."

But her bombastic utterances came to an abrupt end as a servant came in and whispered something to his mistress, which she answered out loud.

"Show her into the little drawing-room, and ask her to wait."

No one paid much attention to the incident, but conversation flagged. Dinner was instinctively hurried through; the idea of the unseen guest seemed to check the spontaneous gaiety of the table.

At last Mme. Le Hallier pushed back her chair and rose. Her sharp movement was the only thing which betrayed her annoyance.

Once more that fatality which always seemed to pursue her had come in her way. Not all her cleverest plans, not all the strength of her will, could escape it. She turned to her daughter.

"The visitor asks for you, Henriette," she said in a low voice. "It is Sister Charteron; I hope she is not in trouble."

CHAPTER X

RESCUE

IT WAS she indeed, in her old black dress and bonnet, looking even more lamentably shabby than last year. She appeared at her worst, overpowered with shyness, and huddled up in an arm-chair, from which she could hardly get up when Henriette came in.

"My dear Sister St. Louis, what a pleasant surprise. I was coming to Paris to see you next week—but I'd much rather see you at St. Germier."

"You are as kind as ever, my dear child!" faltered Sister St. Louis; "but I am so ashamed! I thought I should die of shyness when I found myself here. What in Heaven's name can your mother think?"

"Maman? She was quite anxious about you. You must have had trouble in getting a cab at the station, and perhaps you haven't even had dinner?"

"I really forget—I don't think I had any——"

The fatigue of the journey, with other wor-

ries, and the sense of her intrusion, on the top of everything else, had completely upset the poor woman. Henriette tried to put her at her ease again.

"You shall have something to eat; and then I'll show you your room, near mine, as it used to be. It seems like a dream to be together again. You, who are so fond of the country, will love St. Germier, I know, and to-morrow, when you see our flowers——"

Sister St. Louis roused herself. "To-morrow? But I'm going back at once. I hope my cab is still there—it mustn't be sent away. I must go back to-night——"

"Why?"

Henriette's first thought, as well as her mother's, had been that the nun, turned out of her home, had sought refuge with them. But they were mistaken.

"My dear child," pursued Sœur Charteron in great agitation, "I have something very serious to tell you." Beads of moisture broke out among her wrinkles, with the agony of what she had to say. "I have a favor to ask of you."

"Well, what more natural between sisters?"

But Henriette's smile was not enough to en-

courage Sister St. Louis to begin, although the secret could almost be guessed.

"It is a pleasure to me," the girl went on, lowering her voice; "I have grieved so long at having more than I can spend while you have not enough!"

"But it is not a question of my own needs."

"You or your family are the same thing. I know that complications often arise in business——"

Henriette had not struck the right note yet, however.

"Business? Do you think I should be in this state or taken such a step as this about business troubles? But there are times when one shrinks from nothing. My dear little sister, I want money, a large sum of money. I couldn't think of any one but you who would give it me. Even for a rich person it is no trifle." Sister Charteron ingenuously gazed at the chimney ornaments, the pictures and precious objects about the room, as if to gauge their value, and then said timidly:

"It's six thousand francs—would it be possible to——"

"Yes, of course, I can give you the sum at once, and most willingly."

Sister St. Louis' drawn features relaxed,

and she joined her hands in a childlike gesture of gratitude.

"Oh, how providential! How happy you have made me! You can't realize what this will mean!" Her tears rolled down without disturbing the expression of rapture which transfigured her face. "You can't realize it!" she repeated; "it means a life saved, a soul rescued. Mother Ste. Hélène promised that we should find some good to do in the world if we bore our sufferings patiently. Would you believe that I doubted her words? But I have seen them come true in every sense."

She clung imploringly to Henriette, who was about to rise.

"Now that my horrible suspense is over, let me tell you everything, as I used to tell Reverend Mother."

"But I can not take her place!"

"Yes, yes, you must, now I have lost her, perhaps forever, and only you and I are left to help each other. You must help me in every way to-night; you have come to my aid, and I am so happy, but I have borne too much, and my poor old body is almost worn out. You must help me to recover for a little while. People in the outside world, however kind they

may be to us, can never quite understand us. But I can tell you everything.

Henriette envied her; there was no one to whom she herself could confide all.

With a nun's humble sincerity Sister Charteron poured out her tale in all simplicity.

"Ever since we left the convent I have suffered terribly! I was not able to do any good to my relations; in fact, I seemed to do harm. My nephew grew more and more openly irreligious, and my niece behaved as badly as she could on purpose to annoy me. They seemed as if they were trying to provoke Almighty God because He had given them the extra burden of taking me in. At last I got discouraged and only prayed one prayer. 'Oh my God, take me quickly, since I can no longer serve You in this world! If You won't take me to heaven, send me to purgatory; there at least I can neither be a burden nor a rock of offense to any one!'"

"And you never thought of coming to me, to your little sister, who would have been so pleased to welcome you?"

"I forgot every one and everything," admitted Sister St. Louis with contrition. "Last Sunday I stayed all day in church; it was no use dreaming of climbing up and down all those

stairs between Mass and Vespers! I kept repeating to myself, 'I'm done for, I'm so tired! Oh my God, why won't You let me die?' "

"And Almighty God sent you an answer?"

Sister St. Louis gave a start of admiration. "That's just what our Mother would have said! You have guessed rightly, as she would have. Yes, that very day everything happened!"

She went on in the same careful way. "When I got back the shop was shut. I was surprised, because they never close on Sundays, and as I went up a kind of presentiment came over me. You know how I go upstairs, clinging to the banisters. Well, on the top story I heard voices from our room, and loud exclamations; my heart began to beat, I could scarcely move, and I trembled so that I could hardly get the key into the lock. What did I see?" The whole scene came over her as she exclaimed: "They were all in there, quarreling like mad! My sister-in-law was crying, my brother looked stupefied, and the girl was rolling about in hysterics; while Léon, my nephew, was yelling at the top of his voice, shouting the most disgusting, horrible insults at every one. He said his parents were either idiots or had sold their daughter, and that I was 'an old wretch who had been too silly to see what was

going on, or had helped in the whole business.' He would show us whether he could be trifled with any more than a swell—he had enough left to buy a revolver and he didn't care a curse for the criminal courts! Anything rather than bear such an insult! He called his sister a name I can't repeat, and said she hadn't even the courage to get out of the way! Wasn't the river near enough? The girl had run away at the sight of me, and my sister-in-law shouted to me: 'Hurry after her or we shall have worse happen; it's bad enough already.' And at last I understood——"

Sœur Charteron paused to let Henriette understand, too. When she took up the thread of her tale again her voice had changed; it trembled with infinite pity.

"Poor wretched little girl! If you had only seen her! These things must be seen to be believed. If any one had told me she would really go wrong I wouldn't have believed it. And when I was really face to face with her, she was so terribly unhappy that I forgot everything else. I had left her in the morning, before any one had heard anything, being treated like a respectable girl, and I came home to find her ruined, lost, trampled under foot by every one! We pity any stranger who falls from a roof,

and yet there is no pity in some hearts for a poor human being shattered in every sense, robbed of honor and hope, and even of salvation; she is to be abandoned to her fate!"

The old nun sat up, resting her chin in her hand, her face grown suddenly thoughtful.

"There are times one wonders if the creature who has to expiate so terribly is entirely responsible for her sin. Isn't the world unjust? It laughs at people with ideals, who control self and sacrifice their lives, and when others go to the opposite extreme, and follow their animal instincts in search of pleasure, it casts a stone at them! Poor latter-day boys and girls! They aren't allowed to love God, nor learn duty or self-sacrifice! And yet we must love God—What then?"

The pure old lips no longer shrank from speaking with a new and audacious freedom.

"Poor little Marie-Louise! What has she ever got out of life? Bad example, bad language, bad books! Her brother was the first to undermine her principles. In that horrible back-shop, her mind excited by evil books and pictures, she was ripe for sin, and naturally some one came along to show her the way. It was one of Léon's friends, an agent for motor-cars, well dressed, and a clever talker, accus-

tomed to wheedle men of business. He was supposed to come to us of an evening to see his friend, and on week days to dip into some of the books in the circulating library. The father was always out, the brother was at work, and the mother did not prevent the young people meeting, expecting marriage to follow. It's not surprising that the girl thought the same. This Monsieur Alfred had sworn to marry her, as they all do, and then had put her off with every kind of excuse, till one day she drove him to bay, and he disappeared! The coward! Then some one sent an anonymous letter to Léon, evidently knowing how brutal and hard he could be. Oh, what wicked people there are in the world!"

Henriette sat by, listening to this commonplace story, its attendant circumstances viler than most, owing to the very low surroundings of the Charteron family. The strange thing was to watch the woman telling it, her limpid, innocent eyes gazing above all the sin and shame straight into heaven.

"Poor little soul!" repeated Sister Charteron. "She was past defending herself; every one was free to insult her to the utmost; she was like an animal too stunned with blows to feel anything more. Hours of sobbing had

made her face like nothing human; she lay motionless, half dead. "I'll light a charcoal stove and suffocate' was all that could be got out of her, and her idiotic parents stood by crying, as if they could think of no way of helping her. They gave her up as a bad job and left her to bear her trouble, just as the man had done! When I saw how they were behaving, I don't know what came over me. I suddenly felt that I loved the girl as I did not know I *could* love, as I had never loved any one before, not even you, my dear little one, forgive the comparison! I loved her like my own child; I felt I *must* help her. Can you understand?"

"Better than you think!"

Henriette remembered what she had felt with Linette in her arms in the train, and thrilled again at the recollection. "We love those whom the world rejects," she said; "they belong to us because no one else will have them."

"Yes, yes, that's it, but I didn't know how to put it. The strange thing is how these poor souls naturally turn to us." Sœur Charteron's quavering voice became tender again. "The girl, who had been so insulting and indifferent to me, would listen to no one else and let no one but me come near her. I stayed up all night

with her, making her talk when her heart was too full to keep silent, and letting her rest when she was exhausted; and her poor eyes would open to seek me, as if I were her only hope. It seemed to give her courage to feel I did not repulse her. 'Aunt,' she asked me at last, 'can nothing be done? Is there no hope at all?' She knew there was one hope, and wanted me to point it out. 'He shall marry you, my poor child,' I said; 'I promise you he shall.' "

"How could you promise her?"

"Well, it's like this. When you make up your mind that you will help any one, at any price, even if it costs you your life, I believe God will assist you in the task. Now we can no longer give ourselves entirely to God; we owe ourselves to others. I am giving myself absolutely to this poor child, to try and make an honest woman of her. Thanks to you, I shall succeed. It has not been easy." A sigh of fatigue escaped her. "There was no time to lose. The girl had read so many police reports and novelettes about stories like her own, with horrible endings, and Paris is such a dreadful place for bad advisers, and there are so many ways in which poor girls may be perverted!"

Both women were struck dumb. Both thought of the abysses of ignominy into whose

shadows Henriette hardly dared to glance, but which the elder woman had sounded to their depths.

"While the family were rambling on, taken up with their own vindictiveness and only concerned with their own disgrace, I went to look for the young man."

Henriette pictured the poor woman, doubly handicapped by innocence and age, with no weapon for the fight but her own kind old heart.

"I waited in the Chaussée d'Antin to catch him coming out of his employer's place, and I went up to him in the street. I don't know if he was too surprised to stop me, but he let me speak, and better still, came with me to La Trinité Square, where we stayed talking for more than an hour. The right words came to me by the grace of God. He was very cold at first, and when I mentioned Marie-Louise he turned away and twiddled his silly mustache. At last I touched some chord of feeling in him, and he didn't try and play the fool any longer. He is not really bad at heart. 'I'd marry her,' he admitted at last, 'but my parents won't consent.' Then I went on to see the parents." Sister Charteron sighed; this had been the hardest part of her task.

"I was more lucky with them. They had turned my brother from the door, but they consented to see me. They are small tradespeople, very impertinent, and thinking no end of themselves. They began by being most insulting, and calling my niece every name they could think of. I can't remember what I said, but gradually their manner altered, as their son's had done, and they were melted. The mother cried, and said that of course Alfred had behaved very badly, but he couldn't be expected to make up for it by spoiling his whole future. With his natural intelligence and good opening he could make a fair start, but he needed money. Something could have been arranged if my niece had a dowry, and under the circumstances they would not stand out for much. Had she no relations who would help her? They looked searchingly at me; and upon my word, I think they took me for a rich aunt who would leave Marie-Louise her money."

A gleam of her old sense of fun lit up the sordid picture drawn by the Sister. "They aren't bad people, you know," she said in a gentle, pitying tone, "but so mercenary, so dreadfully grasping and sly! The poor child's honor, her life, her very soul, meant only so much money to them! However, luckily, money

can always be found. So you see I had the courage to come and ask you for some. Oh, I can say it now! People talk of the humiliations of the religious life, but what are they to this? Though I know how kind and affectionate and high-minded you are, I am still shaking all over from even coming to your house."

"Oh, don't say that. It is I who feel humiliated at the sight of you," said Henriette, at last confessing her distress. "You and Mère Ste. Hélène have lived up to your vocation. As for me, it is the first time that I have really done a good turn to any one, and now it is only through you. I'm not thinking of common charity or almsgiving; I mean that it's the first time that I've helped to save a soul."

Mme. Le Hallier came in, to make sure for herself that Sister Charteron should go through the form of trying to eat her dinner before leaving. She signed to Henriette to accompany her, and left the visitor to Paula.

When Henriette found herself alone with her mother she felt the same shiver of apprehension which Sister Charteron had described at the idea of mentioning money to her mother for the first time. Before she had entered the convent Mme. Le Hallier had forestalled her daughter's every wish, and since their serious

quarrel her dowry had been paid without any demand or appeal on the girl's part. Since she had lived at home her purse had always been kept full without any remark. But what would Mme. Le Hallier, prudent, careful woman of the world as she was, say to the idea of giving away such a liberal sum, over and above their usual almsgiving? The mother, however, listened compassionately to the circumstances, and offered no opposition to the final suggestion.

"Then may I have this money, Maman?"

"You need not even ask my consent, dear. You are absolute mistress of your own fortune, not to speak of mine, which is yours too. If you ask for my approval, I give it unreservedly; you could not put money to a better use." Henriette had not expected such quiet, ready acquiescence, but her mother seemed quite as interested as she was.

"At such times the quicker things are settled the better. Let us finish this business at once. Come upstairs with me."

She led Henriette through the hall and corridors and dark staircase, her hand holding her daughter's with a warm, gentle clasp. For the first time they were at one, the same generous impulse uniting them. In the large study next

to her bedroom Mme. Le Hallier went to her safe and opened the iron door.

"One of these days I will settle accounts with you. You will find that there is a balance due to you; the savings of nearly all your income for the past seven years. You can afford to be charitable. You said ten thousand francs, I think."

Henriette did not contradict her, and Mme. Le Hallier counted out banknotes, remarking, "I'll give you the rest in a check." She sat down at her small bureau, took her check-book, filled in and tore out a leaf, and sealed it up in the envelope containing the notes, all with businesslike precision and an exceedingly pleasant expression on her face.

"You will make two people happy," she said, handing the packet to Henriette; "the poor child you are saving and dear old Sœur Charteron. I hope they will be grateful to her for bringing matters to such a conclusion; though for a woman like that the happiness of doing good is reward enough. Even I, who am certainly no saint, found it my only consolation during my years of loneliness. At no time in my life did my fortune ever give me any greater happiness." Henriette knew her mother was charitable, but she had never heard

before of her hidden almsgiving, so liberal, so discreet, and so simply offered. Hitherto the girl had thought such actions the exclusive prerogative of those who have renounced all their own possessions, and she was deeply touched to find that in the outside world charity quite as meritorious and more hidden was to be found.

Mme. Le Hallier closed the safe, and they came downstairs.

"These rescues are only possible to us; for those who pledge their lives have no more freedom of action. If you and Sister Charteron were still nuns, this poor little girl would be irrevocably ruined or dead by this." It was said with apparent carelessness, but the words made a deep impression on Henriette. God alone knows His own wise designs, and perhaps this trial, out of which one soul was already about to emerge purified, would profit others also. She crossed the library where she had talked with Jean, all kinds of ideas and conjectures coming into her mind.

The Des Vernières had discreetly disappeared on hearing of the new arrival, and Henriette was glad not to see them again that evening. And now Sister Charteron, with the precious packet pinned inside her bodice by

Mme. Le Hallier's own hands, was taking leave, murmuring expressions of gratitude which her hostess refused to hear. She stopped in the hall. "I haven't thanked Mademoiselle Paula for her kindness!"

Paula, who had kept her company during the absence of her aunt and cousin, and had disappeared on their return, now condescended to come back, and justified Sister Charteron's praises in a most unexpected way.

"I'm so sorry you're going so early, Sister, but I shall certainly come and pay you a little visit in Paris," she said, as she helped the old woman's stiff arms into the sleeves of her jacket; "I'm very pleased to have made your acquaintance; I had already met Mme. Van Stilmont."

She had never told Henriette anything of the meeting, because of her unlucky expedition with the Druaults. But Sister St. Louis had already heard of it.

"You must have noticed a great difference between us," she said modestly, shaking her head.

"No, on the contrary, I see a likeness," said Paula. She was not intending any sneer, and had taken a great fancy to Sister Charteron.

"Your dear little cousin is a most interesting

girl," mumbled Sister Charteron as Henriette helped her into the cab. As soon as she was settled she leaned forward, adding in a confidential voice: "But she wants looking after."

"Paula does?"

Sister Charteron's old face looked troubled again.

"She has an expression that makes me uneasy. I understand young girls, and she has something on her mind. I saw that look in my niece's face for three months. This child isn't happy either."

Henriette was disturbed. The happiness following a good deed easily done was overshadowed. Years ago she had had the key to Paula's strange disposition, and had understood her better than any one else, but those days were past. Was it possible the poor, simple old Sister Charteron had solved the mystery in a few moments?

As Henriette went back into the house she heard Paula's voice. The girl was talking in her most sneering and annoying tones; it was one of her "bad" days.

"You are surprised, Aunt, that I admire 'those women,' as you used to call them. Well I do! I respect that good old woman and the Superior in their several ways. They are sin-

cere, and sincerity is the only thing that I care about. They have a right to exhort others, because they have cut themselves off from everything, and have utterly sacrificed their very identity. They are above us, above the mean-nesses of life, dead to all which is not God——”

Henriette appeared. “They are really nuns, if you like,” concluded Paula.

CHAPTER XI

FIANCÉE

DURING the late autumn afternoons Henriette slowly paced the sunny patches of the garden, her head heavy with conflicting thoughts. Sometimes gentle, sweet-faced ghosts, wrapped in their trailing violet and white habits, followed her and sought to call her back; sometimes a picture she was half afraid to contemplate in its vague outlines rose before her. But day by day the gentle ghosts faded farther and farther into the distance of the past; there were hours when they became invisible, and Henriette, with a strange longing, would ask herself if Jean were coming. They often disappeared while he was with her. Jean had taken his old friend at her word when she had described herself as different from other women, untouched by their weaknesses and responsible only to her conscience and her own judgment; and he had no idea whatever that it would trouble or disturb her to see him as often as possible, that both might grow to know each other even better as they took counsel together.

Mme. Le Hallier apparently saw the situation in the same light; she allowed him the free run of the house, though abstaining from anything like meddling.

Yet Henriette could not disabuse their minds. Gradually her apathy melted; she could no longer sink back into her old trance of peace; it was impossible to resist the hypnotism of Jean's grave eyes or escape from her mother's burning, watchful glance and the children's clear gaze. Linette had a specially penetrating way of looking at Henriette. The children came every Thursday, that nothing might appear outwardly changed. But Linette, with her abnormally sensitive nature, evidently guessed that something important was in the air and that her own fate was being decided. The clasp of her arms around Henriette's neck, her look of anxiety at the least symptom of neglect, and her radiant expression when the girl caressed her, all spoke too plainly to be mistaken. "Poor little darling, how she needs me!" Henriette would say to herself, torn with conflicting feelings. Jack, too, was quite amenable; he obeyed her at a word, and the new attitude was explained by Linette.

"Paula won't play with him—she doesn't love him any more—nor me either." A

frown crossed the little white forehead and darkened the precocious face. "Last year she liked us very much. Have we been naughty?"

Henriette avoided answering. Paula was still a baffling problem. It was terrible for the two girls to live their intimate life with such a cloud between them. But Henriette felt instinctively that there was danger in trying to unlock the secrets of Paula's heart; a violent explosion which both would regret was bound to follow the slightest touch on such delicate ground. She kept away from Paula as much as possible, and began to forget her presence a little. The interior life is apt to foster a kind of mental selfishness, and Henriette was absorbed in the most engrossing of all problems, the question of her own fate, perhaps even the salvation of her soul. She was haunted by Sister Charteron's words: "Since we can not live for God alone, we must live for others." But this meant moral sacrifice; not the gift of one's self and the acceptance of another. But what if that were the only way to do this particular work? Then suddenly across her meditations would come the thought of how unhappy Jean was. His troubles at last began to be a personal reproach to Henriette, and

matter for remorse. Jean had allowed her to guess what he concealed from every one else, and in return she was adding to his unhappiness by the uncertainty which a word would have removed. At last, after one of his visits, she turned to her mother, feeling that the patience of both was worn out.

"Things can't go on any longer like this," she said. "Maman, I do implore of you to make Jean understand that I can't consent to what he asks."

Madame Le Hallier had foreseen this phase. She controlled herself, as she always did now when her daughter confided in her, simply remarking: "You have quite made up your mind that it is impossible? Then, my dear, you must tell Jean yourself."

Mme. Le Hallier had shown herself so very helpful that Henriette was surprised.

"But it would be very painful; won't you help me?"

"No," returned Mme. Le Hallier. Then gradually she began to get excited. "You will admit that I have carefully refrained from persuading you," she went on; "even now I won't try to reason with you or melt your heart; I leave it to you of your own free will to destroy your happiness as well as that of Jean and his

poor children! As for my happiness, I leave that out of the question. But you have no right to expect me to help bring about such a calamity. I refuse to take any responsibility in the matter. Jean will come back one of these days; you will tell him whatever you think fit, and that will be the end."

Perhaps Mme. Le Hallier intentionally gave a tragic emphasis to the last two words. Henriette seemed to hear the passing bell tolling, as life ended for her. Once before she had felt the same solemn and agonizing impression—it was on the day of her final profession, as she lay under the pall while the bell tolled and the nuns chanted the Requiem. For one moment the flesh had revolted against the spirit, and a temptation had come to throw back the winding-sheet and look upon the sun once more. But on that day Mme. Van Stilmont and the others, who had all come out victorious from the same test, were standing around her. The sound of their peaceful voices and the expression of serenity on their faces, which she guessed at but could not see, encouraged her to make the sacrifice so soon rewarded, while now she was alone with her mother, who looked at her with a cold, desolate gaze, more eloquent than any reproaches.

"Maman, am I really making you unhappy?"

"I thought you could never make me feel unhappy again," answered Mme. Le Hallier in a stifled voice; "but you have wounded me, you have taken away my last illusion. I see that you have no heart; you have left it in that place."

"If I had no heart, could I suffer like this?"

Mme. Le Hallier turned as she was leaving the room. "You have no pity for him, for me, or for those poor little motherless creatures. What should make you suffer?"

"I don't know—I am grieving for you all—and for everything!"

"And for yourself."

Mme. Le Hallier came back and suddenly her manner changed; she threw herself impetuously on her knees before her daughter.

"My darling child, if you are grieving, it shows that you regret your own decision, and it will be worse for you later. You know you loved Jean; don't be ashamed of it before me. You know you can't conceal anything from me. Didn't I know it before you did yourself? I know you love him still!"

"Maman, I implore you——"

"No, let me speak. I never doubted your

sincerity. In the convent you were able to deceive yourself, but you can't any longer, and the sacrifice you want to make now would have no meaning! It is a useless, a dangerous sacrifice! I know life, my child, and I understand you! Such a sacrifice would bring no blessing with it; it does no good to any one, it does harm to all, it is breaking not only your own heart, but the heart of the man who loves you, who pines for you, who needs you!" She rose and left the room. Henriette tried to think, but she could not collect her ideas. She knelt down before her crucifix. "It is not for me," she prayed. "I know how to suffer! It is for them—for him."

But her sufferings were not lessened by the sight of even the Divine Image, and Henriette rose from her knees still bewildered by what she had discovered in herself, and longing for help.

"I'll write to Mme. Van Stilmont."

But the pen fell from her hand after the first few lines. She hid her face in shame at the thought of the woman whose vision she had evoked.

"I can't write! What could I tell her? That earthly happiness is drawing me, and that I am on the brink of love——"

When Jean came next day, Mme. Le Hal-

lier was waiting for him, weary and triumphant after a night of battle and victory. She held out both hands as he came in.

"My dear friend, do you know why Henriette is still hesitating? She fears she can never be as other women, and that she can not make you happy. I am to tell you so from her."

She shrugged her shoulders to make light of the message she was obliged to deliver. But Jean took the words quite seriously.

"Tell her in return," he said, "that I love her just because she is not like other women. She alone can help me forget what I have borne and heal my wounds."

"Jean, you will make another woman of her; you don't know what she has it in her to become. You will heal her wounds, too. She is struggling with herself; it is for you to make her forget the past. Love her so that she will remember nothing but your love."

The betrothal was taken for granted, inasmuch as the word itself was not pronounced. Jean and Henriette felt that they need not exact promises from each other, and Mme. Le Hallier was the first to say that no official announcement should be made till they all went back to Paris, which would now be very soon.

Henriette had to rehearse her part before spectators were allowed to look on. She realized to the full how awkward she was in taking up the thread of normal life once more, and, having forgotten for so long the conventional attitude, had constantly to fight against reminiscences of the immediate past. The most insignificant things were the hardest to overcome. Particular views on particular points, mechanical habits of cloister-life, the very large sign of the cross made at table, and the extra deep genuflection in church, all these still remained, though they corresponded to nothing in the present state of things.

"I am rather like a mummy, with the traces of my bandages still around me, though they are unwound," she said one day to Jean.

"What made you think of such a ghastly comparison?"

It was one of the ideas remaining from her having so long and fearlessly confronted the idea of death during her years in the cloister.

"I shall frighten Jean away," she said to herself humbly; "I am forgetting it is my duty to make him love me," and her old pretty smile banished the painful incident. The idea of having a duty toward any one always gave her back her energies, and she was beginning to en-

joy escaping from the terrible solitude of her own thoughts, with Jean beside her, confident and happy. She had not hoped for more than this when her poor tortured heart had yielded, but gradually her horizon widened.

"I have to be more than a friend to him, and for that I must try to become what I used to be."

Mme. Le Hallier did her best to help them along the road back into the past, that hardest of all feats to accomplish. The monotonous background of country life was favorable to Henriette's quiet charm and gentle personality, the Le Halliers' select circle was just the right frame for a serious girl of twenty-seven; Paula's radiant youth might have thrown her cousin into the shade, but with unexpected tact Paula herself left the field free.

"Here comes the first bouquet!" she had exclaimed, when a bunch of white flowers in a Japanese vase appeared on a certain morning in October, which was Henriette's birthday.

"Lovely flowers," she said, plunging her impertinent little nose among the late roses, and curling her lips in a sneer; "but they smell of autumn!"

"So they do!" said old Des Vernières, sniffing

the air; "the nice spring smell has quite gone, and one is dropping just because we smelt it. The worst of it is that these are the last!"

"Oh, no! After these we shall get Christmas roses."

"Ah, but wait a bit," he answered in his rambling voice (botany was not his strong point), "Christmas roses aren't roses at all."

"Some people prefer them; it's a matter of taste."

That day Paula had ridden off on her bicycle directly after lunch, saying it was a pity to waste the last fine days; and since then she had made still better use of the weather by joining different shooting parties given by hostesses in the neighborhood. Mme. Le Hallier allowed her perfect freedom for her latest caprice; a carriage was always at her disposal, and luncheon was served specially for her alone, so that she could keep her appointments punctually. Paula often dined out also; in fact, very little was seen of her at home. Henriette was a little taken aback at such absolute independence, but her aunt reassured her.

"I know your cousin thoroughly," Mme. Le Hallier declared; "she has too much pride to compromise herself, and she knows exactly how far to go. If she doesn't choose to take us into

her confidence, she must arrange her life for herself. That is her only chance of settling."

"Do you think she has any particular man in view?"

"I shouldn't be surprised. She has written to her father lately by every mail, and that is most unusual."

"Perhaps her plans are not in a way to succeed, and that makes her so bad tempered," hazarded Henriette.

"Of course there is the difficulty of her marriage settlement."

"What? Was it not understood that you would settle something on her?"

"I never promised anything of the kind. Do you suppose that in your lifetime I should impoverish you to enrich another girl?"

Mme. Le Hallier was on the brink of giving way to one of the old fits of passion, which she had controlled of late. She stopped and went on quietly.

"Of course I knew you would not neglect a girl whose future is in our hands, and I intended to ask you to meet me in some arrangement of this kind. As I told you, the income of the capital your father left you, and which I never touched, though I had the right to use it, has been mounting up for the last seven

years. There is a sum of nearly two hundred thousand francs."

"Give it to Paula, Maman; but it won't be enough——"

"No; I shall add a hundred thousand francs from my own savings; that will make her a nice little nest-egg without crippling you."

Mme. Le Hallier had the double satisfaction of feeling that these calculations were quite in accordance with bourgeois ideas of what was suitable, and that at the same time her conscience was clear with regard to Paula.

Henriette also felt relieved; Paula was no longer wrapped in an uncomfortable atmosphere of mystery. Instead of a perplexed and tormented idealist and dreamer of vague dreams, they had to deal with the ordinary modern girl, distracted with preoccupations concerning her settlement in life, an ambitious girl whose poverty barred the way to her ambition, and who could be calmed and consoled by having the way made smooth for her. Here again Mme. Le Hallier's knowledge of the world was useful, and her tact and generosity solved the problem. She intended acting with the utmost delicacy.

"Before making the final arrangements, my dearest, we must consult Jean. Of course this

is a mere formality; he is the last person in the world to make any objection. You had better speak to him as soon as possible, while we are still here. I expect he will be coming in presently."

It was a day of the St. Martin's Summer, wonderfully mild and warm and full of contrast. Great rifts of sky, as blue as in spring, showed through the black branches of the trees; long patches of sun fell on the leaf-strewn earth, and little bright crimson Bengal rosebuds decked the bare rosebushes.

"Paula has fine weather for her shooting party," said Henriette as she strolled with her mother and Jean. "Don't you ever shoot now, Jean? You used to be so fond of sport."

"No. I gave that up with everything else. Perhaps next year I'll shoot again."

They would be married then, and Jean evidently expected her to revive all his old tastes for him.

"At your age," said Mme. Le Hallier quietly, "no one should give up anything good. With so many years before you, you might feel the blank."

Henriette understood the hint. After leaving the world, it was now her duty to come back into society and encourage Jean to do

the same. Bareheaded, her pretty hair roughened in the breeze and powdered with gold from the rays of the sun, she was walking along deep in thought, languidly lifting her pale green velvet dress, when she caught Jean's eyes fixed lovingly on her, and blushed so deeply that he could not help remarking it.

"Won't you allow me even to admire you?" he asked. Mme. Le Hallier had just left them, and suddenly Henriette felt that she was being very silly. To atone for it she put her arm in his of her own accord.

"There is nothing to admire in me, and there are things I think more of than admiration."

"You would rather be loved—you are right."

He spoke in a grave, deep voice, which she had never heard before. The past was recalled by everything about them, the colors, sounds, and accents of autumn all conspired to bring it back. On such a day of an autumn long ago Jean had come to take leave of her after his holiday, and had gone without saying the words she would have given the world to hear. And now that he was with her again, and the words really spoken, they did not satisfy her; vague, uneasy doubts stirred within her heart.

"Jean, will you ever love me as you used to?"

He was not expecting such a question; it

disconcerted him, but he only hesitated for a second.

"I shall love you more, Henriette," he said, speaking with an unmistakable accent of sincerity, "and I know that you will love me better than any one on earth, more than you ever could have loved me, for now our love will be absolutely unselfish."

She did not understand why the answer hardly satisfied her; it seemed only another variant of old M. Des Vernières' eternal refrain, "What does the poor boy want? A friend. What does the dear, good soul ask for in life? An object to devote herself to!"

The old man now appeared, Mme. Le Hal-lier not having been able to hold him back any longer. "We aren't disturbing the lovers' walk I know," he began, so sure of being always right that he immediately joined them, suiting his pace to theirs, and began to hold forth.

"So we are going to desert St. Germier this week, eh? It's funny to think that perhaps you will be married by the next time you come. You are quite right to have the wedding in Paris. It is more convenient, as well as being simpler—and more suitable."

Once launched, nothing could keep him off the vital topic.

"How smart you are!" he said gallantly to Henriette; "your mother always had so much taste."

"Henriette has much better taste than I," said Mme. Le Hallier in the exasperated voice which would have warned any one else off delicate ground. But he never saw his blunders, and now hastened to make matters worse by apologizing.

"Yes, of course, she used to dress so well in days gone by. I remember your pretty dresses when you used to get up all kinds of amusements with Jean."

They were passing the tennis courts when he was suddenly inspired with one of his most unlucky and irrepressible notions.

"I should like to see you two play together once more," he cried; "it would make us all feel young again. You might just try, now we are quite alone."

The racquets were fetched, and Mme. Le Hallier followed the slightest details of the experiment with pathetic eagerness. She reveled in the sight of her daughter.

"Only eight months," she said to herself; "it's only eight months since I got her back,

and the work of eight years is almost undone. She is still young and lovely; she is going to live a new life."

Jean threw the ball. Henriette missed. He served another with his old dexterity, and succeeded in catching the one which Henriette threw back with a nerveless, hesitating fling.

"She's got out of the way of it," remarked old Des Vernières benevolently; "no wonder, after not playing games for so long."

Jean no doubt thought the same, and Henriette also; they both tried to get away from the idea, trying hard to prevent the game from becoming a sort of martyrdom. He was polite and encouraging, and she conscientiously tried to play well, but she was stiff and awkward, her activity was visibly forced, and she flushed with annoyance while good-humoredly laughing off her mistakes.

Mme. Le Hallier guessed what was paralyzing her daughter. The change in her habits was too suddenly, too brutally, made public, and the girl felt how ridiculous she must look.

"Why did I not think of that before?" thought Mme. Le Hallier, trembling with fury; why did I give in to that meddlesome old fool?"

The blunder was even more serious than they could have expected. Out of a side-path came Paula, back from her shooting party, dressed in a short cloth coat and skirt of the latest shade of "burned timber," her little felt hat cocked over one ear, bringing with her the atmosphere of a long day's enjoyment in the open air.

"Just in time to make the game go!" cried old Des Vernières.

Henriette gave up her place with alacrity and took refuge beside her mother. As she sat under the trees in the fading sunlight of the short afternoon, in her green dress, she looked like one of those indefinite outlines vaguely sketched in by a modern painter who wants the figure of a woman to replace an antique Dryad against a background of dead autumn leaves. Paula was playing opposite Jean in the last rays of the sun, running, bending, rising, with erect head and supple arms.

"I've won!" she cried with a loud laugh. Then, disdainfully, as if she had amused the onlookers long enough, she threw down her racquet, and turning her back to her partner, went off without another word.

"What a temper!" said the bewildered old

man. "And to think that there are men who fall in love with girls like that, under the pretext that they are attractive!"

"Come and advise me about my new buildings," interrupted Mme. Le Hallier. The pathetic shade of envy which had passed over Henriette had quite disappeared, and she took the opportunity of expiating her momentary weakness as she walked toward the house with Jean.

"I wish they weren't quite so hard on Paula. Perhaps her bad temper is caused by circumstances, and she might be quite another girl in different surroundings. She can be very charming when she likes."

"Yes, to a man who could satisfy her ambition."

"Perhaps we can find one."

"Ah, I thought as much. Is she going to be married?"

"I don't know, but Maman thinks as you do. And that reminds me, Jean, of something I want to tell you about."

Henriette was too full of her project to notice the bitterness of Jean's tone, and, as she had expected, he agreed to it at the first word.

"You couldn't do better, or, indeed, otherwise! The least your cousin can expect is to

be provided for as well as possible under the circumstances."

"God grant she makes a wise choice!" sighed Henriette. "I do so wish her to be happy—as happy as I am!" She stopped. She had forgotten Paula; and as the words left her mouth she started, and half wondered if she had really said them. She seemed to be living the life which spiritualists call that of interchangeable identity; beside her was a second self, a *double*, the Henriette of days gone by, freed from all her aspirations to cloister life, and moving untrammelled toward the consummation of earthly happiness. The *double* did not fade away, and during the whole of that day she lived a two-fold life, divided between two reincarnations. She dwelt for the most part in her former personality, and felt herself revived and thrilled with forgotten emotions. This extraordinary dream-life lasted after Jean had gone, and was still unaltered when she found herself alone in her room. Solitude restored none of her usual thoughts—all scruples were swept away in the whirlwind of her new vitality.

"I am happy!"

She was happy at last with something more than the realization of an ideal of duty. Linette, her mother, and all the claims they

stood for, were no longer the only objects she was to live for. At last the image of Jean had come between her and all else; she felt her heart go out to him, or rather all the loves and longings of her heart made but one burning offering, a heaped-up trophy whose dazzling light almost blinded her. Her mother was right; some human happiness may be half divine.

"I am happy, I am happy!" she repeated. Her heart was overflowing with joy, and true to her old instinct of sharing all things, she felt it must be communicated to others. She gently opened the door which divided her room from Paula's. They slept next door to each other, as sisters do, but seldom went in and out, having such different habits. Henriette liked to be quiet, and Paula was always arranging her clothes, when she was not reading some extraordinary rubbish. Though it was late, she was still reading by the light of her night-lamp, one elbow in her pillow and the other hand keeping her long, tangled hair out of her eyes.

"I was afraid of waking you," said Henriette. "It's a very bad habit to read so late at night!"

"But if one can't sleep without?" said Paula, still keeping her yellow-backed volume open.

As Henriette stood at the foot of the bed, watching her, she could not help noticing how changed her cousin was. By daylight, when Paula was dressed and looking bright, she appeared unaltered, but here, in her careless *déshabille*, and seen by the light of one little lamp, the girl's features looked drawn and lined and her bare neck thin; among the surrounding whiteness she seemed so pale and frail, such a poor, child-like little creature, that all Henriette's sisterly love, so brutally refused, stirred again in her heart.

"But why can't you sleep, Paula dearest? Are you ill, or in any trouble?"

"I? What trouble should I have?"

"Girls of your age always have lots to think about. Your future, for instance."

"My future is settled."

Paula had closed her book. She sat up in bed and faced her cousin with the look Henriette knew so well. Two angry sapphires blazed in a marble mask.

"I spoke to my aunt to-night, or rather she spoke to me, on the subject of my future. She was very kind, more so than I have ever known her in all the years I have lived with her. She even went so far as to want to rob you of money to settle it on me."

Mme. Le Hallier's offered favors seemed to have hurt Paula more than all her past unkindness, and a note of injury sounded through all the young girl's irony.

Sœur Charteron was right; the poor child was half mad with concealed grief.

"How can you say such things, my darling? How can you take such a tone?"

Paula could not contain herself any longer.

"I won't take anything from my aunt or from you. Besides, you are offering what is no longer, strictly speaking, yours to dispose of."

"What? Can you believe Jean capable of vile, mercenary ideas when he does not know the meaning of a covetous thought? He takes as much interest as I do in your future happiness——"

"What business is it of his? I don't want him to think about me, or do anything for me, either——"

"Then you hate him, too?"

Paula did not answer. She buried her face in her pillow among her masses of fair hair. After a few moments she spoke, and her voice sounded to Henriette as if each hoarse, jerky word were impelled by a strangled sob.

"All I ask is to go out to Papa in Madagas-

car. I've written to him, and I shall go, whether he refuses his consent or no."

There was a dead silence, which Henriette was afraid to break. Her heart began to beat wildly. She dared not put aside the tangled curls which hid Paula's tear-wet face. She had an instinct that she should discover what Paula was trying to hide, and that it would be calamitous for both. She left her cousin to cry alone, and returned to her bedroom, where only a few moments ago she had been so happy. Human happiness was already bringing in its train human heartbreak, the struggle to defend a prize, and those bitter suspicions which spare no one.

"Paula?" she repeated to herself; "is it possible that the explanation of everything is that Paula is in love with Jean?"

Human egoism was awake, and ready to fight for its own. "But he never gave a thought to her," she told herself with savage triumph. "I know it, and that's all that matters."

CHAPTER XII

THE SECOND SELF

HENRIETTE no longer attempted to struggle against circumstances; Paris and her mother's influence gradually completed her transformation, although there were still intervals of hesitation and obstacles in the course of her ordinary life. When she was deep in prayer in any church, her soul seemed to escape and refuse to come back to the world. Sometimes she had passing hallucinations. She fancied a veil was still hanging over her shoulders, a rosary still clinking at her side; Sister St. Gabriel, her *double*, would suddenly come out of the shadows and prowl around her other self, peering at her in the darkness with astonished and reproachful eyes.

"Will this go on forever?" Henriette asked herself; "even when I am Jean's wife?" She was growing accustomed by degrees to realize her future life, and the thought seemed less startling and the contrast less abrupt when her fiancé was not with her. Jean was detained in the country on business connected with his

property and his municipal duties, and she had her own reasons for not pressing him to come to Paris. Neither of the cousins had since alluded to what had passed between them, but Paula was more at her ease and seemed to have regained more self-respect since she had shaken off the burden of deception and declared her plans. The final settlement of her affairs was now entirely left to her to arrange.

"What will become of her if she refuses to take anything from us?" said Henriette, with a heavy heart. But her mother reassured her.

"Paula's father can refuse her nothing," she said.

Marigny, Mme. Le Hallier's brother-in-law, was still, at fifty, the typical younger son who from time to time is evolved out of generations of quiet bourgeois, and seems to have been created for the express purpose of directing property in his own direction when it shows signs of becoming locked up in one particular family. With a masterstroke he had lanced the vein through which ran his mother's savings; and after that, his own patrimony, his wife's dowry, with numerous collections made among relations, had all flowed evenly away. When the family resources were exhausted and every possible reversion anticipated and spent,

he had turned his attention to the New World, and had visited several colonies with a view to his own special form of industry. His traveling companion having long since left him and the inhabitants of Madagascar being equally disappointing, he was not unwilling to take Paula back, and to spend whatever allowance was made to him for her upkeep, since nothing better offered.

"I shall make it impossible for him to touch her capital," pursued Mme. Le Hallier. "Putting aside his morals and his temper, he is a delightful man, and Paula will not be at all unhappy with him," she concluded with businesslike common-sense.

But Henriette could not carry it off so lightly, and her heart sank at the prospect. Paula now ranked among those people dear to her in the past, whose memory now brought with it only anxiety and a vague feeling of remorse.

Mother Ste. Hélène headed the list. As Henriette had not had the courage to ask her late Superior's advice, she had simply written announcing her engagement, and had awaited the answer for several weeks in gradually lessening suspense and anxiety. At last Mme. Van Stilmont's letter arrived in Paris. It was

written on a tiny sheet and envelope of the ruled white paper always used in convents, in the fine, compact, conventual handwriting, which no emotion is ever allowed to render tremulous. It contained merely a few lines wishing the bride-elect happiness, asking for and promising prayers, and was exactly the letter which any nun would write to any engaged girl. It contained nothing that Henriette had dreaded, but on reading it a second time this omission seemed cruelly significant. Mother Ste. Hélène no longer wished to vie with the world for the possession of Henriette. She gave her up, and considered her henceforward as a stranger, writing to her as "My dear child," instead of as "My daughter." The well-known impression of the lily, stamped in its simple outline on a corner of the paper, with the cross at the beginning and the end of the letter, seemed the Alpha and Omega of all things to Henriette, as these symbols passed once more before her eyes ere the letter was hidden away in a drawer. It was the last Mme. Van Stilmont would ever write to her. First their lives, and now their souls, had been divided; the soul that still inhabited the mountain-top could no longer understand the woman who had gone back into the valley, and all intercourse be-

tween them could only be unprofitable and painful. Henriette realized this so thoroughly that she had not yet ventured to go and see Sister Charteron to tell her of her new projects. But the old nun, who was still in Paris, would be fretting, wondering why she was so neglected after the great kindness shown to her. It was strange, too, that she had never written to any one at St. Germier after her visit. Perhaps the poor old soul was suffering from the cold, wet winter. One morning after Mass Henriette asked her mother to come with her to see Sister St. Louis.

"But I have to go to the Louvre first," objected Mme. Le Hallier, "and it always bores you to come. Shall I send you straight in the carriage to Rue d'Aumale?"

"I'd rather go with you. If I go alone I shan't be able to explain what I have to say."

"Don't be anxious. The dear soul has too much to thank you for to take anything amiss," returned Mme. Le Hallier placidly.

As she sat beside her mother in the coupé, the same little blue coupé that had fetched her from the convent, Henriette recalled that night. Was the world to which she had returned corrupt even in its charity? Had her mother intended to buy over Sister Charteron

by the rescue of her niece? But the old nun did not understand the world and its calculations. Why did Henriette dread her frankness and simplicity? "Perhaps she would pardon and encourage me," thought Henriette; "she is so broadminded and so indulgent to the young. She pitied every one, even a stranger like Paula! But what would she say of us both if she knew all?" concluded the girl, with a sudden pang.

They arrived at the Louvre, and her reflections were put to flight in the crowd; thought seemed out of place where external impressions held so much sway. Everything seemed in a whirl and a commotion, and while her mother was making her purchases Henriette turned from the dazzling counters to watch the crowds moving incessantly through the shop. Here and there a shy man slipped hurriedly through the avalanche of females. Every kind and type of woman was to be seen, gentle and simple, idle and busy, sweet-tempered and cross. Fresh faces, painted faces, dark and fair waved heads, little screws of gray hair, disheveled locks, Gainsborough hats, dowagers' plumed bonnets, midinettes in sailor-hats, beaver and ermine coats, black caps and rabbit-skin boas, stifling perfumes, light kid-gloved hands holding

leather cases, bare hands mottled with chilblains grasping purses full of coppers, the pretty woman a man looks at, the painted one he avoids, the country cousin, recognized from afar, the baffling foreigner, and women who belong to no special category, strangers in every sense of the word, not forming part of the crowd and attracting the eye while one conjectures who and what they are and whence they come. Henriette's wandering gaze fell on a wide-backed, square-shouldered woman in a bright blue dress, standing by the desk. Great twists of black hair showed under her gold-braided toque; her whole style, dress, and manner were difficult to place.

"I shall see her face when she turns round," thought Henriette.

After counting her change and clumsily collecting her parcels the lady in blue turned around at last. A fat, crimson face appeared under the toque, and aroused some dim memory in Henriette. The lady in blue was passing her when she involuntarily stopped, with an exclamation.

"Perhaps you don't recognize me?" she said, embarrassed at having stopped.

"Oh, yes, I do——"

Even the unmistakably Burgundian accent

was not needed to make Henriette certain that she knew her, but it was the name that puzzled the ex-nun. What was she to call a woman who had spent more than a year under the same roof with her, and had been practically a servant? Henriette had never heard her family name, but she could not with any decency call her Sister St. Vincent, as she had done in the convent.

The *ci-devant* lay-sister, equally embarrassed, tried to pass things off with a smile. "I'm very pleased to have seen you again," she said; "you're looking very well."

"So are you!" answered Henriette mechanically.

"Oh, as for me——" the lady in blue, whose manners were not of the best, began to lose her head. Then her rustic naïveté came to her aid, and she crossed her huge hands in front of her, so that it should be impossible to avoid seeing her large wedding ring. "I should have called to see you," she whispered, "but I hadn't the face. You see, when I left the convent I went back to Burgundy, to my uncle, who has managed my farm since father and mother died. We couldn't afford to break up the land or sell, I had no money to make a home anywhere else, and I couldn't live at the farm

because of my cousin. So they thought I'd better marry him. Even *Monsieur le Curé* said so!" She lifted two great anxious eyes to Henriette's face. "It was M. le Curé who made me marry," she repeated; "the wedding was six months ago, and I'm——" She unclasped her hands. But the blush of confusion seemed permanent, and it was that which had evidently made it so difficult for Henriette to recognize the face that had always been so smilingly pink and white under the starched white wimple. "So now," she continued, "my husband has taken it into his head to settle in Paris as agent for a winegrower, and we actually live in the Rue de Grenelle, quite near the poor old convent! It makes me feel quite ill whenever I have to pass it. They say it's coming down—and then nothing will be left!"

The young wife sighed heavily.

"I wanted to ask after the other ladies," she said timidly; "I'm as fond of them as ever, and if I don't give any sign of life it's only because they would be grieved and angry with me, you see."

"But why? You were free, and we can only hope that you are happy. I hope you *are* happy?" The question was asked with such anxious eagerness that the *ci-devant* lay-sister

failed to grasp the idea in Henriette's mind. Despite her honest fat face and her coarse, heavy figure with its air of good-natured vulgarity, she looked the personification of sadness as she replied: "My husband is a good fellow. But when you've been used to thinking different, well, there, you don't seem able to alter. I don't feel natural-like in the world, and I never thought I should—I never would have got married if there'd been any other way out of it."

She walked away, hanging her head, awkward and absent-minded, among the elbowing crowd. She had "been used to thinking different," and, like the other ex-nuns, would never be really at ease in the world. In her naïveté she had not attempted to hide the influence of the past over her simple nature; the reminiscences with which she was saturated were pathetically apparent, even in her clothes. Her idea of grandeur was to get as near the decorations of Our Lady's chapel as possible, hence the bright dress and gold-braided toque. At least they recalled the diadem and mantle of the statue!

"How pale you are! I hope you haven't taken a chill!" said Mme. Le Hallier. She had finished her shopping, and now came out

with Henriette into an icy fog which had suddenly come on. Traffic was impeded, and Henriette was easily persuaded to give up the intended visit. She wondered when she would dare to make it. Was she less delicate-minded than the ex-nun she had just left, who at least had demurred at personally announcing her desertion?

"You look tired," repeated Mme. Le Hal-lier; "we mustn't have you ill when Jean comes next week."

But this diversion did not turn the current of Henriette's thoughts. She continued to brood over the transformation she had seen; she could not forget the sight of a *ci-devant* lay-sister as a married woman expecting to become a mother. The impression culminated at last in a phrase which rang in her ears. She kept saying to herself, "It's natural, yet I'm surprised; it's quite legal and proper, and yet I'm shocked!"

When they reached home the servant who opened the door held out a card. "Perhaps Madame will not send the carriage away," he said. "In your absence some one came to fetch Mademoiselle Henriette to a sick person, and Mademoiselle Paula went, leaving word for Mademoiselle to follow."

Madame Le Hallier and Henriette both looked at the card, which bore the name of Léon Charteron.

"Sister St. Louis is ill!" exclaimed Henriette; "she must be dangerously ill to send for me!"

They got into the carriage again, and resumed their drive; the fog hung dense in the air, heavy and lugubrious as death. When they got to the shop Henriette pointed out in a stifled voice that the shutters were closed. She went up to the concierge, who was standing on the doorstep. "How is Sister Charteron?"

"Much the same," returned the woman, apparently surprised at the question. "She's never very grand. It's about three weeks since she came down. She's getting on in years, you see."

"They told me she was ill."

"She may be; now I come to think of it, I did see the doctor go up. But it can't be anything very serious, as nothing's been altered."

"But the shutters are down."

"They are taking a holiday. It's Mademoiselle Charteron's wedding-day. They've been gone two hours already, and can't be long

now. But you can go up; there's one young lady upstairs already."

Léon came to the door in his best clothes; he had evidently intended to go to the wedding and had changed his plans at the last moment.

"Aunt had a slight fainting fit this morning," he explained, "but she forbade our telling my sister. However, she had another just as they were starting, so I stayed with her and sent for the doctor. As he said she was in danger, I thought I ought to let you know." He spoke with the precision of a man who has learned everything he knows from books, and his language matched his stiff attitude in his black coat. His face was worn and pale from study, but though its native coarseness was apparent through all, he looked very different from the revengeful, spiteful boy who had once rushed out upon Henriette and her mother. He received them almost cordially in the little dining-room, arranged in readiness for a modest wedding-breakfast. On the table, which took up three parts of the room, stood bottles of wine and ale, cakes from the confectioners' next door, and white and red mottled galantines, garnished with aspic, looking like fish-glue.

"I knew that my aunt would wish to see you,"

he continued; "she didn't send for you, but only because she feared to give trouble; that is her one idea. She must have been seriously ill for some time, and the doctor can't understand how she has held out for so long."

He made these remarks in surprised admiration. Brutal natures are impressed by any form of strength; even moral strength is better than none.

"Up to this very morning," he went on, "she was quite cheerful, though she must have been nearly at her last gasp. It appears that her heart is hopelessly diseased. The trouble over this marriage was the last straw."

"But she will recover—she isn't in any immediate danger?"

But Léon would not listen to any such suggestions. "She will probably not last out the day. We thought she had passed away in a fit of suffocation when your sister first got here." He took Paula for Mme. Le Hallier's second daughter, and there was something in the mistake which hurt Henriette at such a time.

"I'll go up and see Sister St. Louis; I know the way," she said, going to the dark landing.

Sister St. Louis had indeed been ill for a long time past, but no one had noticed it. No one had taken the trouble to look after her poor

den. Cleanliness, her last luxury, was gone. Even the engraving of the Annunciation was thick with dust from the old wooden boards and smuts from the fireplace, where a sputtering coal-fire was giving off strong heat and nauseating odors. An old neighbor, doing duty as nurse, was busy with something in a corner, a black and fateful figure. Golden-haired Paula, in a light blouse, sat between the bed and the window, holding Sœur Charteron's hand in hers. She did not move when Mme. Le Hallier and her daughter came in. Henriette saw at a glance that the end was at hand. Not the agonizingly painful end of one who, no matter how bright her hopes of the next world, struggles in the dark night of earthly regret, and whose heroism is the price of a hard fight. Sister St. Louis was utterly calm and peaceful, obedient unto death, without one disturbing word or thought. Till yesterday it had been her duty to pray, work, and suffer; to-day her duty was to die. It seemed quite simple.

"I was not sure I should see you again," murmured the dying woman, as Henriette leaned over her bed. "So I was looking at her. She is so like you!" Her eyes turned toward Paula. Her thoughts dwelt persistently on

the stranger girl, but now she recurred to the subject which had preoccupied her so much lately.

"You know it's Marie-Louise's wedding-day?"

Henriette made a gesture in the affirmative, lest a word should start her tears flowing.

"She went away in a white dress—she is at church—she will come back married."

The dying woman, her poor body shaken by the loud, hard pulsations of her diseased heart, seemed soothed by the joy and peace she had brought back from her visit to St. Germier. She began to speak of that evening.

"You did this for me, my little Sister!"

"No, no," protested Henriette, "it was you, all you!"

"I could do nothing. I had nothing to give."

She had given her life and had forgotten the gift.

Suddenly she took Henriette's hand and held it to her heart. "That is the only part where I have any pain. I thought I was going in the night, but I asked Almighty God to let me live till to-day." She ceased, and Henriette made way for the doctor and nurse, and for the priest, who had brought the Viaticum during the morning. Their ministrations were

short. Neither the healer of the body nor the physician of the soul could do anything more, and when Henriette came back to the bedside she realized that Sister Charteron wished to spend her last moments on earth with her former companion. Henriette began to dread the supreme privilege for which she had longed and hoped. Upon the face of Sister Charteron was falling rapidly the last sinister "change"; but this was not what frightened her companion. She had seen death at the convent; she had watched old nuns expire as gently as the flame of an exhausted altar-candle; she had seen the martyr, Sister St. André, slowly devoured by cancer, afraid to pray for death because it was a harder sacrifice to go on living; she had heard her triumphantly singing the *Magnificat* in her delirium, and she remembered the little novice of eighteen, whose blue eyes never left the crucifix during her two days' death agony. Sister Charteron was dying, too, as Sisters of the Annunciation know how to die; and she must be allowed to keep her illusions lest such a beautiful death should be disturbed. She must be allowed to believe that she has a nun beside her to say the *Magnificat*, to inherit her hopes of immortality, and to follow one day the example she is giving now.

"Sister St. Gabriel, will you go to the cupboard and get——"

Henriette understood. Carefully folded in its cardboard box was the long violet and white habit; as Henriette lifted it, sprigs of lavender fell out, filling the room with sweetness and beauty. Then came the long chaplet with its shining silver crucifix. Sister St. Louis wanted to look at them and touch them once again. To-night she was going to wear her beloved habit, and where she was going none would bid her cast it aside. Persecution and contempt had had their day, and the very memory of them was fading away. Henriette read soothing words to her from the worn pages of her breviary, which lulled her to sleep. Then the beating of her poor heart roused her, and one more kindly word passed her lips:

"You must tell our Mother that I prayed for her, and ask her to pray for me."

"But, Sister St. Louis, you aren't so far gone. You will see her again."

"No, but you will, and it's the same thing——"

Henriette hung her head.

"My niece is married now," said Sister St. Louis. The fever was gaining on her, and her gray face beamed. She opened her eyes anx-

iously: "Your cousin?" Then a moment later: "Poor little girls!" Her lips moved inaudibly. Was she offering her last earthly prayer for weak and erring souls, for poor little creatures all of earth, so far from her own spiritual ideals, and given up to all the dangers from which she had escaped?

"Dear Sister St. Louis," said Henriette, bending over her. "How happy we have been!" The silence was growing oppressive. Henriette was wildly tempted to throw herself on her knees and confess all; that she might ask one word of spiritual counsel from the woman who was already half way to another world. No, it would be a crime, she told herself. The dying must be allowed to go in peace, the deathbed of a saint must not be disturbed.

Then, to Henriette's secret relief, Mme. Le Hallier returned, followed by Paula and the others. Léon, still with his air of astonishment, came to take one more look at the old woman, whom nothing could trouble or disturb, and who could contemplate the Infinite face to face. Gently, almost tenderly, he lifted her in his arms, while they tried once more to make her swallow some restorative. She looked at him from under her half-closed lids, and even then her eyes seemed to say, "I have conquered you

after all!" With some vague, awkward impulse to be tactful, he made way for Henriette. The others did the same; they all respected the tie which obliterates all social distinctions and bound her to Sister Charteron; even Mme. Le Hallier felt that she must keep in the background.

Paula was the only one who did not seem impressed, and Henriette fancied the girl was trembling all over with conflicting feelings and a longing to speak the truth at any price. She dreaded every moment to hear her cousin say right out before them all: "You have no better right here than we have. You are taking her last blessing under false pretenses. You come here as if you were still faithful to your vows as a nun, and you ought to have told her the truth this very day."

But Paula was not speaking; it was the voice of Henriette's double, that other self, who, as the death agony set in, took up the Annunciation Breviary to finish the Office.

"*Magnificat*——" Sister St. Louis' dying voice was sinking to an almost inaudible whisper, when a loud commotion was heard below. The noise came up even into the death-chamber, the whole house seemed in an uproar. The wedding party were arriving, relations, bride

and bridegroom, and best man, all thinking it their bounden duty to make up for their small numbers by causing as much uproar as possible. The solemnity of the occasion had brought out the rustic capacity for enjoyment which still lurks in the heart of so many workers in big cities. Suddenly the merry sounds were checked, evidently while the bad news, hitherto concealed, was being told, after which the hubbub of voices went on again. Then in the half light of the bedroom appeared an indistinct white blur, the bride, a pathetic looking figure, her great puffs of crimped black hair starred with orange blossoms and her face livid under the veil—too worn out by the dreadful interval of suspense to look happy even on the great day, and overwhelmed by the ill-luck which seemed still to be pursuing her.

“When I started they made me believe Aunt was all right. And I come home to find her like this! Auntie! Auntie! Don’t you know me? You were so good to me. I shall never forget it!”

They let her kiss the dying woman, and her husband led her sobbing away. An orange blossom had fallen on the bed; Sister St. Louis’ trembling fingers found it and would not let it go.

"They've made an honest woman of the poor little girl," she murmured, and that was her last response to the *Magnificat*.

God had ordained that to her last hour in the world she had just left her life should be spent in the service of others, and she had returned to Him in the full joy of doing His will.

Henriette's hand trembled as she closed the dead woman's eyes; was this sisterly office only one more deception? In her confusion she forgot the last salutation due to a dead Sister of the Annunciation, and it was Paula who remembered to say:

"Ecce Ancilla Domini!"

"Fiat mihi secundum verbum Tuum," responded Henriette.

For the first time for many days the two cousins looked each other in the face, and Henriette was bewildered by what she saw. Beside the dead body of Sister Charteron, a poor, obscure, wretched old woman, Paula, the ultra-modern girl, Paula, the heartless, ambitious girl, had burst into a passion of sobs.

CHAPTER XIII

THE WHITE BOUDOIR

“DON’T stop!” said Mme. Le Hallier, as she came very gently into the little Empire drawing-room, where Henriette was playing. She sat down on the sofa while her daughter finished her Mozart sonata. The girl had taken to her piano again; music had been the first sign of her resurrection, and now her old interest in artistic and purely feminine pursuits was beginning to revive. She had taken a great fancy to the pretty white boudoir, where she now kept flowers, books, and needlework; and Mme. Le Hallier felt grateful to even inanimate objects when they served to attach Henriette to her home once more. The mother had felt terribly anxious as to what effect would be produced by the death of Sister Charteron, and her burial in the Community vault, which had been opened on purpose to receive her coffin, being in the last convent burial-ground spared by the new laws. But apparently the violent emotions aroused by such reminders of the past had produced a favorable reaction in Henri-

ette. After one final interval of hesitation and a short pause to collect her ideas the girl had resolutely resumed her new attitude toward the prospect before her. After such a conclusive test Mme. Le Hallier felt practically easy in her mind about a difficulty which still had to be faced.

Henriette struck the final chord of her sonata and sat on for a moment longer at the piano, in a mood of pleasant languor. The warm atmosphere of the charming room and the scent of the Riviera flowers must have lulled her into a kind of day-dream, for when she came to sit by her mother she failed to notice the expression of sadness on the latter's face, and Mme. Le Hallier was obliged herself to allude to the subject in hand.

"My poor darling, I have something to tell you which I'm afraid you won't like—I would have put it off till later, but——"

"Is it that Jean isn't coming to-day after all?" interrupted Henriette quickly.

"No, nothing is altered; he will be here in half an hour; and that is really why I wanted not to spoil the day for you, but Paula hasn't left me any choice."

"Paula?"

"Come, darling—don't agitate yourself—you knew it would have to come."

"She's going?"

"Yes; she's just heard from her father; he consents to her coming, and even asks her to lose no time.

"When does she leave?"

"To-day," said Mme. Le Hallier, almost in a whisper. Then she hurried on, so that Henriette could not get in even an exclamation: "She doesn't want to miss a very excellent opportunity which happens to offer itself. Some very nice English people, a clergyman and two lady missionaries are starting, and she can travel with them. They are sleeping in Paris to-night, and she declares she can be ready. She must have been preparing in secret for some time——" Mme. Le Hallier stopped to let the last words take effect, and then proceeded to point out how magnanimous her own behavior had been.

"I offered to go as far as Marseilles with her; the steamer doesn't leave till Saturday, and that would have given us three days. But she pointed out that this would have only tired me for nothing, as she has traveling companions, and at Marseilles her old schoolmistress will take her in till the boat leaves. As she prefers

the society of strangers, of course there's nothing more to be said."

"Leaving to-night!" repeated Henriette; "what madness!"

"Well, surely it's best to get the thing over and not prolong the farewells."

Having broken the news, Mme. Le Hallier began making the best of things. "It is wiser to go at this time of year, when the crossings are good; and as far as we are concerned, this business had much better be got over before the spring."

The spring was the time vaguely thought of for Henriette's marriage. Before her eyes passed a sunny vision; she saw the house decorated for the great day and herself radiant, beloved, an April bride. Paula was going into sad and lonely exile. But there was some mistake. Which of the two had already renounced all the joys of this world? Mme. Le Hallier broke in upon her musings:

"Paula is going out to do her final shopping," she said; "are you going up to see her before she goes?"

The rather inferior room on the second floor occupied by Paula had already taken on the depressing aspect of a room about to be

vacated; plants had been allowed to die, ornaments had all disappeared, and packing cases blocked the way at every turn. Paula herself, in an old dress, and looking very tired, seemed to have lost her natural elegance and charm; she, too, had already begun to look as she would eventually in the melancholy future before her. Paula, Henriette's little pet cousin, her doll and "baby" in days gone by, looked upon by all as taking the elder girl's place, and becoming her aunt's heiress—this was what she had come to! Nothing was left for her, not even a home under the roof she was running away from, not even the semblance of family life, not a chance for the future! Henriette was cut to the heart.

"It's not possible that you're really going?" she said.

"Did you expect me to stay on?" asked Paula, who had pretended not to see her cousin come in. She raised her head and looked the other full in the eyes with an undisguised expression of contempt. But was not her bravado more sincere at such a time than Henriette's pity? The elder girl felt a strange longing for peace and reconciliation; something stirred in her heart and she yearned over Paula.

"You can't go away like this, without one kind word to me. Paula, I have always been

so fond of you. Even if you hate me, you can't deny that I love you."

A shadow of emotion crossed Paula's stony face. "You've been fond of me in your own way, I dare say," she said slowly, "but not in the way I understand love." She refused to say more, and with set lips began mechanically folding up pieces of lace, as unmoved by Henriette's departure as she had been by her entry.

"Vindictive, hardened, unjust, unreasonable, heartless," muttered Henriette as she went downstairs, the burst of indignation relieving her pent-up feelings. Half-way down, a ring at the front door stopped her; she looked over the banisters, and as Jean's voice floated up to where she stood her heart grew light again. In a moment she was with him, happy and excited. Jean's presence drove everything else away; he brought light and joy with him, and at last her youth came back on the triumphant wings of love. Jean saw that she was transfigured.

As she took him into the little white boudoir, its gaily tinted draperies, its flowers and plants, and the atmosphere of tender, womanly welcome and girlish happiness seemed to wrap him round with a sense of warmth and sweetness doubly dear to him after his own desolate house among bare, leafless trees.

"Oh, how sad I have been without you!" he cried out, and the words were profoundly true.

"Have you finished your business?" asked Mme. Le Hallier.

"Yes, thank God, I have. I'm going back to-night to fetch the children, and we shall settle down as quickly as possible in the flat you found for us. I have just been to tell the landlord I'll take it."

"Until your plans are really settled," added Mme. Le Hallier.

Jean understood that preparations for the wedding were to be begun without delay.

"As I came through the *Rue de la Paix* I brought some rings for Henriette to see," he said; "perhaps she will choose one." He produced a small parcel and began opening ring-cases.

Once again came the tender and eternal duet, the discussion over all the symbols which generations of superstitious lovers have examined together. Emeralds, the color of hope; sapphires for fidelity; pearls quickly thrust away for their nickname of tears; a hurried hiding of the opal, sign of ill-luck.

"This looks more like you," said Jean at last, holding up a dazzlingly pure diamond; and Henriette chose it.

"What a pity it's too big and I can't put it on your finger to-day!"

Mme. Le Hallier had left them alone, and Jean was sitting on the end of the lounge, absorbed in contemplation of the lovely fair head against its yellow velvet cushion.

"Do you know what you remind me of?" he asked.

"Oh, *please* don't say Madame Recamier!"

Both smiled at the recollection of old Des Vernières' worn-out simile.

"No, something better. You look like one of the illustrations in the Missal your mother was showing us the other day at St. Germier. Why, the book's here—what a good idea to bring it with you."

Jean got up and brought from one of the tables a fine Dulot edition, of the period when such books were beautifully reproduced, about thirty years before our story opens. It was a "Lives of the Saints," given to Mme. Le Hallier by the priest who married her. The illustrations were superb colored lithographs. The Saints appeared as the early masters painted them, haloed with gold. Here were no naïve, frieze, veiled in ecstatic innocence; but spouses and mothers, their heavenly beauty still reflecting the traces of human joy and sorrow: Eliza-

beth, wife of Zacharias; Veronica, spouse to Zachary; Felicitas, Juliana, Anastasia, Monica, Helen, Clotilda, Adelaide of Burgundy, Margaret of Scotland, Hedwig of Poland, Elizabeth of Hungary, Francesca Romana. Most of them wore the splendid dress of their period, jewels from the treasuries of great ladies of rank, and royal or imperial crowns, which only enhanced the glories of the nimbus around each head; nearly all were surrounded by children, little earthly angels joining in the procession with their heavenly prototypes.

"Where are the husbands?" asked Jean. "Perhaps the painters thought they had already had their share of Paradise on earth! Ah! what joy, what rest there is in store for the happy man who is in love with a saint on earth!" He took Henriette's hand, but at the contact his smile faded. "How cold you are!" he said; "don't you feel well?"

"No; I was upset by something this morning. I felt sad, as you say you did, but it's all over now."

"Tell me everything!" he said, with a new kind of tender authority, which Henriette found too sweet to resist.

"It's about Paula."

"Is she going to be married?"

"Unfortunately not; although she has had very good chances. Only last week she refused Monsieur de Champreux."

"What does she want, then?"

"To go back to Madagascar."

"But she must be talked out of such folly," said Jean in an altered voice.

"But it can't be got out of her head. The boat starts in three days, and she is leaving here this evening——"

Henriette watched Jean. He rose, pacing the room.

"You are surprised, aren't you?"

"More than surprised—grieved."

Henriette saw that Jean was more moved at the idea of Paula's departure than she had been herself, and the more agitated he became the colder she grew.

"I can't help thinking how you will miss her," he continued in the same troubled voice; "and then, of course, I myself can't quite lose all interest in what is to become of her. I've known her so long, and I've always seen her so different from what she's been lately. She used to be such an attractive, affectionate girl. I assure you that although she wasn't very

happy with your mother, she was a most devoted niece, and kindness itself to Linette and Jack; in fact, she was a dear, good, simple child, as amusing and cheerful as possible. She had none of these caprices and extraordinary ideas in those days. What can she have got into her head?"

"That's what I ask myself," said Henriette.

There was an oppressive silence for a few moments. Then Jean continued: "It is really pathetic, all the same, to see a girl who is little more than a child starting off for such an impossible place as Madagascar to go and live with a father who is bound to make her miserable. I know Monsieur Marigny—he's a nice protector for a young girl!"

"Paula isn't the sort of girl to have illusions; evidently the prospect of such an existence can not be so very alarming, as she has chosen it in preference to any other." The words might have come from Mme. Le Hallier in one of her most judicial humors, and Jean, feeling slightly disappointed, turned toward his fiancée, who was looking more than ever like some sweet-faced saint in a stained-glass window.

"You are quite right," he admitted. "It was madness to have refused young Champreux, but was there any method in her madness?"

"Folly would not be folly if we could see a reason for it."

"You are quite right," repeated Jean.

Mme. Le Hallier joined them at tea-time; only three cups were brought in on the tray. Already Paula had ceased to be a member of the family.

"She sent back the maid," Mme. Le Hallier informed them, "with a message that her friend was keeping her to dine, and that she would call back to get her boxes."

"In that case I shan't see her," said Jean, "so please say good-by to her for me." The word "good-by" recalled the past, and he remembered how even at Lourdes, after her exhibition of temper, Paula had not been able to bring herself to let him go without a friendly wish. Yet now she was going away forever without one sign of farewell to him or his children. Even if she felt no deep regret, it seemed hardly possible that she should not be conscious of the almost physical pang inseparable from all final partings, and which Jean himself was most decidedly conscious of at the present moment.

Mme. Le Hallier ordered the carriage, and he was not sorry to get out of the house. It was a bright, frosty winter's afternoon, just

the weather for "smart" people to be out driving behind spirited horses, who were excited by the keen air and made the hard roads ring with the metallic sound of their hoofs. Coachmen and footmen sat stiffly wrapped up on their boxes, while motors flew through the air, with chauffeurs looking like shaggy bears in their heavy furs, and women tucked themselves away into warm, close coupés, their faces peeping through the glass like chilly winter roses in a greenhouse. The north wind drove foot-passengers indoors, and at last even beggars retreated from street corners and archways.

With darkness came the starlight of street lamps, electric signboards and shop windows began to glitter, lamplit coaches and trucks rushed by like falling stars, and the little will-o'-the-wisp of an occasional steamer flitted here and there on the Seine. Paris became a solemn, half-deserted city of the north, a fantastic vision of opulence and pleasure. The town seemed more than ever to belong only to the rich and to those happy people who need fear neither solitude, cold, nor sadness, and who feel an additional pleasure at the thought of the hardships they are not called upon to bear.

After stopping to make an appointment at the lawyer's office, our party went on to the

jeweler's to have Henriette's ring altered, and by this time they were all in such good spirits that Mme. Le Hallier ventured on the audacity of proposing dinner at a restaurant. The inevitable melancholy of a family meal, with Paula's place vacant at the table, suddenly struck them; and a quarter of an hour later they were sitting in a fashionable restaurant, struggling at first to be cheerful at all costs, and gradually finding themselves in the right key of the other diners, carried away by the irresponsible gaiety of the moment and their surroundings. Even Henriette roused herself. The words, "a dear, good, affectionate child, as cheerful and amusing as possible," rang in her ears; evidently that was Jean's taste in women. But his rapt admiration of the afternoon, the gaze he fixed on her as he compared her to a saint in an illuminated Book of Hours, had changed to a troubled and uncertain look.

As they left the table Henriette caught sight of herself in a mirror and started. The glass gave back a smiling, brilliant face, dancing eyes, and roguish lips. Paula!

Jean left them early, having to go back to the country that night. And then it became imperative to look after Paula for the last time.

She arrived at the station at the last moment, among all the hurry and bustle of departure, and up to the moment when she actually got into the train with the sallow-faced, clean-shaven clergyman and the two old maids, she retained her stony and impassible expression.

"Adieu!" she said, and put her icy cheek against Henriette's face without a tear.

The train rumbled away, the English people waving handkerchiefs, and mother and daughter drove home in silence.

Next morning Henriette awoke in a strange frame of mind; all the melancholy of the day before had flown, but her feeling of buoyancy and happiness was such that she dared hardly admit it to herself. Her mother's relief was past putting into words. There was no one to come between them now, and Henriette's path to her new life was clear.

They went out together to see that comfortable arrangements were being made for Linette in the furnished flat taken by Jean, and when they reached home and were sitting in the half-light by the boudoir fire Mme. Le Hallier allowed her thoughts to wander. Perhaps she was remembering that evening of the past year when she had felt so hopeless of ever recaptur-

ing her daughter. The girl seemed closer to her mother than ever, but only just lately, only since a gust of jealousy had wakened up all the smoldering womanhood in Henriette, and it was Paula's hand that had put the last touch to the mother's laborious work. Paula had been a providential instrument, destroyed just when, as a weapon, she was about to become useless or dangerous. No one else could really separate them now; and in the intoxication of her triumph Mme. Le Hallier took her daughter in her arms and covered her face with those fierce kisses which once had shocked the girl and now only made her smile. Then the mother stirred the coals, and the room was lit up with firelight. It looked a perfect nest of comfort.

The footman came in softly, bringing letters. He turned on the light in one small lamp, that they might see to read Jean's letter announcing his arrival next day with the two children. He seemed very near them; their gentle home atmosphere was already drawing him into its charmed circle.

There was another letter by the same post, and Henriette had hardly opened the parchment envelope before she put it down again. "How unpleasant scented paper is, and what writing!" Then she turned to her mother and

went on discussing some detail in Jean's letter, as she slowly tore apart the heavy vellum envelope reeking of some suggestive and penetrating perfume. A cut-down half-sheet came out, covered with a huge, irregular handwriting, which suggested the efforts of a medieval cook just learning to write. The signature caught the eye at once—"Blanche Druault."

"It's from Madame Druault."

"What does she mean by——" Mme. Le Hallier was beginning, when Henriette interrupted her.

"Ah, *mon Dieu!* Madame Van Stilmont has had an accident!"

"Give me the letter!" exclaimed Mme. Le Hallier, but Henriette kept the sheet out of her mother's reach and went on reading in a breathless voice.

"Our friend, Mme. Van Stilmont, has just been the victim of a terrible accident, which leaves us no hope of her recovery. I have been obliged to leave the chateau and take my children away from contagion, which it would be useless to expose them to, since, alas! there is nothing more to be done. It would be madness for you to risk coming, and you would probably arrive too late. You need have no anxiety. My husband and I have spared no ex-

pense or trouble. If the worst comes to the worst, I will send you a wire. And as soon as I get back to Paris I shall feel it my duty to come and tell you all that remains to be told of the one dear to us both, and whose memory will always be a link between us."

Henriette did not trouble to read the elaborate formula at the end, and Mme. Le Hallier seized the letter and read it through again.

"The woman is mad!" she exclaimed angrily. "First she mentions an accident, and then talks of contagion! We must wire back and ask her to explain."

"No, I must go."

Henriette had already dried her eyes, and the long-forgotten expression on her face alarmed Mme. Le Hallier far more than the bad news in the letter.

"Don't get excited, dear. We must consider what to do."

"But there is no time to consider—it is a question of hours."

"But don't you understand?" Mme. Le Hallier was trying to hint at the sad inference.

"I understand only too well that Mme. Van Stilmont is dying, neglected and alone. These people have no heart, they are inhuman, they have no sense of decency. They are already calculating what it will cost to bury her, and

arranging to make capital out of her memory.” And Henriette gave a horrible, stifled laugh.

“The letter has been to St. Germier, so it is already two days old,” continued Mme. Le Hallier.

“But I have received no telegram; Madame Van Stilmont must be still alive.”

“My poor child, they wanted to spare you a shock.”

“Madame Druault wouldn’t know the meaning of such delicate feeling.”

“At any rate, she warns you plainly that you couldn’t arrive in time!”

“Even if I don’t—” Henriette stopped to choke back her tears, “you can’t want to prevent me doing for Mother Ste. Hélène what you thought quite natural when Sister Charteron died.”

“It is not the same thing.”

“What is the difference? The tie is even stronger in this case. I loved Madame Van Stilmont more than any of the others, and I owe her far more.”

“You don’t even know where she is,” interrupted Mme. Le Hallier hurriedly.

“Yes, I do—Chateau de Lomery. Lomery is a station before Rheims, and there must be trains starting to-night.”

"Then let *me* go!"

"*You?*" Henriette understood. "Poor Maman! the idea of contagion has frightened you; but I'm not Madame Druault. It does not alarm me at all."

"Then you are wrong; it ought to alarm you for the sake of those belonging to you. What would become of us if you brought back the infection to Jean or the children?"

"What would become of me if I let Madame Van Stilmont die without ever seeing her again?"

"But you've been told you can't expect to see her again. If even she were still alive, do you think she would be so selfish as to wish you to risk your life for the sake of giving her consolation which she can not need, for the poor woman is going straight to heaven and regrets nothing on earth? Death will be a happy release to her. Do you suppose that even I, who am certainly no saint, would ask or even allow you to come near me if I were in her place? Not only should I have concealed my illness from you, but my only consolation in death would be to know that I had kept you from any risk of danger."

But Henriette was unmoved by Mme. Le Hallier's vehement and angry protestations.

"Mother Ste. Hélène would not ask for me; she would be quite sure I should come. As to our ideas of life and death, they are not those of other people."

The words "our ideas," and the unmistakable bond of union they implied, struck Mme. Le Hallier unpleasantly. She was conscious of more danger to Henriette than that of catching an illness—the contagion of spiritual influence seemed in the air once more. Mme. Van Stilmont was a different type of woman to Sister St. Louis, the simple soul who had only left behind her memories of quiet resignation and a humble, hidden life. Mme. Le Hallier remembered the glimpse of the ascetic face with burning eyes which she had seen at Lourdes. Mother Ste. Hélène was still her only serious rival; the mother knew that nothing could move the nun's inflexible standard of faith and morals, and she believed that the ex-Superior, to her last hour, would put aside her own sufferings to make one more effort to regain Henriette. A wave of terror and hostility swept Mme. Le Hallier off her feet and carried her past the bounds of her usual prudence.

"You don't know what you're saying!" she cried out. "You forget your duties. Your

life is not yours to risk. You are my daughter and Jean's promised wife."

Henriette's face seemed turned to stone—the long-forgotten look was still in her eyes. Mme. Le Hallier had evoked a vision that both mother and daughter beheld. The two women seemed hypnotized by Mme. Van Stilmont's imperious challenge from the threshold of another world. The girl gazed fixedly at her mother: "I can't realize who or what I am," she said, slowly passing her hand across her forehead.

"Henriette!"

"Stop! You are trying to prevent me from doing my duty; but the past can't be wiped out like this. I vowed fidelity and obedience to Mother Ste. Hélène, but what is even more, I loved her. There is no dispensation from vows of love. She is suffering, dying alone! I am nearer to her than any one else in this world, and she has a right to have me with her."

"And what of me? What of Jean?"

"I have taken no vow to Jean yet; and since you have mentioned him, let me tell you he would not wish to prevent my going. He knows that soldiers do not desert their superior officers."

"You have no Superior now."

"Yes I have. Mother Ste. H       did not desert her post of her own accord, and what she once was she is still. She is still the Superior of the Annunciation nuns—and I feel now that I am still her daughter!"

At last one of the terrible fits of fury, which Mme. Le Hallier had so long succeeded in curbing, burst out. Her tongue was loosed. "No!" she screamed; "you gave yourself back to me, and you shan't deceive me again. You have absorbed all my love, and now you want to throw me aside and trample on my poor, broken, useless heart. Enough of this folly, this distortion of nature! Your natural duties are to me, to Jean, to the poor little orphans who look to you as their future mother; I should think such duties were imperative enough without adding unreal obligations and wicked foolhardiness. Yes, *wicked*, for you are risking what belongs to us! But this time I'm going to fight for my own. You *shall* obey me. I'll find a way to make you!"

It was one of the old scenes of six years back, and now, as then, Mme. Le Hallier watched her daughter bow her head beneath the storm, only to raise it again, inflexible in her gentle strength. Then she recollected herself, and,

suddenly appeased, tried to take up the thread of her words:

“You know I never interfere with you, my child, when a good work is to be done, as you saw in the case of Sister Charteron. I am only blaming you now for being imprudent. It is such a piece of madness to start off without knowing where you are going or what you are going for. I only ask you to wait for details. That is not much to ask, surely; any sensible person would agree with me. We shall know in an hour or two. It’s quite simple to wire to that Druault woman, at the address she gives near Rheims, and perhaps we can reach her by telephone. Let me see to all this; you aren’t in a fit state to. Now try and rest and keep calm. When people want to help others the first thing to do is to control their own feelings——” and Mme. Le Hallier gently took her daughter to her bedroom.

They both needed to be alone after the shock, and the mother felt she must act at once. She shut herself into her own room, and before telegraphing to Mme. Druault she wrote a long telegram to Jean. This, however, she tore up. It was not enough; a letter alone could explain the whole situation, and if sent by express would reach him nearly as soon. She began

the letter, stopping once or twice to listen for sounds, but the house was perfectly silent. She had said "out," which was an excess of precaution, as no one would be likely to call so late on a very cold winter's afternoon. Dinner would soon be ready, the evening would be spent in expecting news, that would bring them to the next day, and Jean would have time to come to the rescue. Mme. Le Hallier concluded that Henriette would be praying, and pictured her comforted and calmed by prayer, as she so often had seen her.

But the cleverest among us are sometimes apt to make too sure that we have foreseen every contingency. The mother had not known how to interpret the stony glance turned away from hers, the eyes obstinately fixed on the ground to avoid meeting the opposition in her own.

Henriette had indeed tried to lose herself in prayer, but as soon as she was on her knees, with her face hidden, she had to rise. There was no longer any struggle within her; interior promptings had their way, and her mother's absence gave her a sensation of such freedom as she had not felt since the first night she came home. The memories of that day rushed back upon her with their old intensity. The very

walls around her seemed as unfamiliar as when she had just left her cell at the Annunciation; she was once again the passing guest, exiled, banished, awaiting her recall. Now the signal had come. She forgot St. Germier, the past months and weeks, all the temporary scheme of life which she had mistaken for a definite end; even the interview at Lourdes and the agonizing struggles with herself faded from her memory. There was no longer any hiatus between the last day in the white community-room, when Mother Ste. Hélène had bidden her go, and the present hour, when a suffering voice called upon her from a distant death-bed to return. For a few moments her own painful thoughts would have their way, then the strain relaxed, and she came to a swift, definite conclusion.

“Whatever I do, I can’t be sure of getting there in time; if I hesitate and stay quarreling with Maman, or if I let her have her way, I am certain to get there too late.” She did not reason with herself any further; in fact, her natural habit of hesitating before any decision seemed to have quite disappeared. The phenomena of double identity, two souls, two wills, two minds, ceased to trouble her, and she was once more mistress of herself. Her thoughts and actions concentrated themselves on the ac-

complishment of the end in view, with more than usual energy and precision.

The timetable which had been used to find a train for Paula still lay on the table; and Henriette rapidly looked out a train for Rheims. The only evening train, an express, started at 6.20, and reached Lomery a little before eight o'clock. It was a quarter to six; she had thirty-five minutes to reach the *Gare de l'Est*.

She noiselessly and quickly opened and shut wardrobes, and slipped downstairs with the inaudible tread of a sleep-walker. Although she wore her hat and long traveling cloak, she neither feared to meet any one nor was she stopped on her way. The door of the Empire boudoir was ajar, and she went in. The lamp still burned beneath its pink shade like a blossom of fire in the middle of the room; the coals still blazed, all the inanimate symbols of indolent luxury seemed to try and impede Henriette and to struggle against the mysterious power which was drawing her away.

The young girl shivered, as a somnambulist about to awake. There on the table lay Jean's open letter, breathing of love and union; happiness was near, and the love of the father burned through the innocent affection of the

children. Henriette almost faltered, but a strange feeling of strength buoyed up her footsteps. Even if she wished to reach Jean, she must pass the deathbed to which one last call of duty was taking her. Then, and then only, would she be really free; the last vestiges of the past which had always been an obstacle between her and Jean would disappear with Mme. Van Stilmont.

The memory of the last day at the Annunciation assailed her once more. They had been three women united together by a supreme tie of obedience and sisterly love. Her two companions were claimed by death, which was breaking up a community never capable of existing as less than a company of three nuns. Now she could freely come back among the living, the last debt paid, the last reproach wiped away.

"What I am doing for the past will make smooth the way for the future," she repeated, overcoming her last hesitation; and feeling her will strong to act, she closed the door.

She slipped bravely away into the shadows, leaving behind her the pretty, flower-scented Empire boudoir, nest of art and wealth, with its rose-colored light shining on her love-letter. She believed that she was coming back to her

day-dream, and to a happy future dearly bought by one more last ordeal.

The kitchen and adjoining premises were full of the bustle of dinner preparations, and she was able to cross the hall and open the front door unobserved. The concierge must have been surprised to see her go out alone, but he kept his opinions to himself until such time as he should be questioned on the subject. There were no difficulties in her way; a cab passed just in time to take her to the station, which she reached five minutes before the train was due to start. "Now if Maman has even found the note I left," she thought, "it's too late for her to come after me."

She hurriedly took her ticket, chose a compartment, and dropped into her corner as the train steamed out of the station. Paula had left the night before, and now Henriette was going, too, alone into the darkness, toward some horror which she had not yet realized.

CHAPTER XIV

IN THE SHADOW OF DEATH

“**Y**OU see that light? That’s the lodge at the park gates. Go straight on and you can’t miss it!”

A polite guard, who had come out of the station to direct the solitary traveler, hurried past, and Henriette went on her way. It was a sharp, frosty night, and brilliant moonlight lit up the hard road, which had not thawed for two days, and made the hedges sparkle. White, deserted fields stretched right and left away into the darkness. In the distance could be seen a dark mass among trees, and in the infinite stillness of the icy air nothing living seemed abroad except Henriette, who hurried on, breathless with anxiety, toward the light. The tragedy was beginning; this was the scene of the Prologue. She came to a gate and rang. The sound brought out a man looking vague and ghostly under the blue moonbeams.

“I’ve come to see Mme. Van Stilmont,” whispered Henriette, as if she were already in

a world of shadows, and passed hurriedly on, without waiting to ask for news, lest the precious minutes should be wasted.

What had looked like a wood was only a screen of fir-trees, and she found herself close to the house, on a bare clearing intended for a park. All was new, and evidently lately designed for owners who had just begun to spend money on it. The moonlight showed bow-windows and pepper-pot turrets, Italian terraces and Russian-latticed windows, while among all these heretogeneous decorations stray points of gilding and colored paint caught the light and glittered like Mme. Druault's jewelry.

The house was in darkness, and the shutters closed; it seemed utterly deserted. There was no barking of any watch-dog, and Henriette was almost surprised to find the door opening immediately after she had let the heavy Renaissance knocker fall on it.

She had prepared no words of explanation, and said, as she had done at the gate, "I've come to see Mme. Van Stilmont."

In the medieval hall, where sets of Spanish armor faced stuffed white bears, a peasant woman, who seemed a strange substitute for a liveried footman, stared at Henriette in stupe-

faction, and then turned on her heels. "I'll go and tell Monsieur," she said.

But Monsieur himself now appeared. The woman went away, and Henriette found herself face to face with Comte O'Gorney. After the journey and the arrival in a strange place, it was a kind of relief to see any face to which she could put a name. At least he could relieve her horrible suspense.

"How is Mme. Van Stilmont? Is she——" Henriette stopped.

O'Gorney, instead of answering, lifted a portière and bowed: "Please come in, Mademoiselle," he said.

They were in a large, badly furnished drawing-room, with ambitious frescoes, and Henriette, who was still standing, could see nothing but the tall, impassable, lugubrious figure speaking words she dreaded to hear. "Am I too late?" she asked.

He bowed again.

Then, suddenly feeling her knees giving way beneath her, she dropped into a chair and sobbed. He discreetly walked away, but as soon as Henriette appeared calmer he came near and seemed prepared to answer her questions.

"Then everything is over—when did she die?" she asked through her sobs.

"Yesterday morning."

Henriette rose.

"May I look at her once more?"

"No, Mademoiselle. The usual arrangements could not be made—we had no time to lose."

The girl gazed at him with eyes full of terror as he concluded, "She was buried to-day."

Henriette felt that she was in the presence of some sinister mystery surpassing her worst fears.

"Why, what—what happened? I don't know anything, Monsieur. I came away after receiving an incomprehensible letter from Mme. Druault."

"Do you mean to say that Mme. Druault did not tell you about the accident?"

"She alluded to an accident."

The old sneer flickered for a moment over O'Gorney's withered features, and then he went on speaking, trying his best to soften the horrible details he was going to describe.

"Mademoiselle, we must not forget that Mme. Van Stilmont died the death that she would have chosen of all others for herself; she

gave her life for others—" Henriette listened speechless and motionless, while O'Gorney tried very gently to lead up to the point.

"Monsieur Druault bought an enormous Pyrenean dog at Lourdes, which he named Strong."

Henriette remembered the huge mountain dog, with his enormous fangs and mouth perpetually dripping with foam.

"Strong was simply a wild beast, and Druault himself dared not go near him after two or three people had been bitten; but although every one warned him, he persisted in keeping the creature. Some days ago the dog became ill. He refused his food, and he was carefully watched and kept chained up in the stable. Last Monday he managed to escape, even now I don't know how. Mme. Van Stilmont was taking the children out for a walk, and they were not more than a few hundred yards from the house when the wretched brute rushed out on them from behind a bush. Directly she saw what was the matter with him, the poor woman cried out to the children, 'Run away, run indoors!' and to give them time to get away she put herself deliberately in front of the dog. Her life was not worth a moment's purchase. She did not hesitate, she offered herself a will-

ing victim and went to her death—but what a death!” The horrible description of the monster paled before the heroic vision of the nun who had died the death of an early Christian martyr; her soul had been the sport of brutal oppressors, and her body literally thrown to the wild beasts. But O’Gorney added realistic details to the ideal picture.

“She absolutely encouraged the dog to attack her, so as to divert his attention from the children—the winter sun was shining, and she shook the sunshade she was carrying in his face; we saw her do it.”

“And no one went to the rescue?”

“There was no time, and only Druault would have had the strength.”

O’Gorney’s glassy eyes, which had reflected no generous feeling for over thirty years, shone for a moment.

“At last some farm laborers arrived with forks. The dog had thrown the poor woman down, and although I had my gun, I could not have fired without hitting her. I lifted her up. She was in a horrible state, and they all thought she was dead, but she was quite conscious, and found the strength to say to me: ‘Take care; the dog’s mad.’” O’Gorney hurried to the end of the story.

"It was impossible to dream of taking her to Paris, but they sent for one of the doctors from the Pasteur Institute. He came the same evening, and tried everything, but only for his own satisfaction, as the wounds were hopeless in any case. She died of her wounds, and we must be thankful that God spared her a more horrible death still!" He stopped, astonished at having called so naturally upon the name of God, which for so long had only passed his lips in sarcasm or with the free-thinker's careless effrontery. The experiences of the last eight and forty hours had stirred the very depths of his nature. Many good impulses had been shipwrecked there, and some were floating to the surface again.

"I shall never forget her courage. She had foreseen and faced everything. She said to me quite quietly: 'At the first symptom of rabies you must have me tied down, and put a grating across my room. No one is to come near me but the priest, who will give me final absolution. That is all I ask.' What a woman! And when you compare the selfishness and cowardice of her employers! They were like children or lunatics, refusing to believe that they were in no danger of any kind. They were mad with fear, and imagined that every-

thing in the place was infected. Druault didn't know how to get his car ready quick enough. As for the martyr who had sacrificed her life to save their children, they were afraid even to look at her! She would have died alone in a corner if there had been no one else here to look after her. I can put up with a good deal, and one can make excuses for most things nowadays, but such cowardice and ingratitude make one positively sick."

He was beginning to be proud of having the right to despise any one. Some remnant of humanity and chivalry still remaining in him had prevented his running away from the horrors of such a death. He had not quite sunk to the level of these brutal cads, he told himself. The man who had seemed unworthy even to approach Mme. Van Stilmont was the one chosen by God to be alone beside her in the last solemn hour; the sinner had closed the eyes of the saint, and the mere contact had purified him.

"Please let me thank you for all you have done," said Henriette, giving him her hand. She was no longer ashamed of his seeing her tears, and let them flow unchecked. "I loved Mother Ste. Hélène so dearly! It was more than the affection one feels for an ordinary

creature, one of ourselves, for she was like no one else; she seemed above human nature, and nearer God than we are. If you had known her as I did you would understand the mysterious side of her character, hidden from the rest of the world, which only saw her in her every-day life."

"I saw her die," said O'Gorney slowly.

No doubt he had not forgotten the jokes about "the Abbess." Placed as they had been, she standing for austerity and he for license, they had been hereditary enemies in the natural course of things, but when they found themselves in the presence of death a strange affinity drew them together. Their souls went out to each other in pity; he grieved for her, and she, in a much deeper sense, for him. Though he did not reveal the secret of Mme. Van Stilmont's last words to him, Henriette was in no doubt about their effect. She was able to spend an hour with him alone in a strange house, listening to what he had to tell her about the dead woman, her sweet and peaceful exit from the world, the wishes, hopes, and messages she had entrusted to him. But there was no word of what Henriette longed to hear, and which would have taken the sting out of her grief. O'Gorney did not approach

the subject, and the girl was obliged to ask him point blank if Mme. Van Stilmont had asked Mme. Druault to write to St. Germer.

"No; when we asked if there was any woman friend she wished sent for, she answered: 'Do not trouble any one to come.' "

"And she never mentioned me?"

It had never cost O'Gorney much to pervert truth, but he dared not do it in a case like this.

"I don't remember hearing her mention you by name, Mademoiselle, but perhaps she gave some message to one of the nurses, whom you will see to-morrow."

Henriette suddenly remembered the lateness of the hour, and the strangeness of the interview.

"It only remains for me to thank you once more, Monsieur, and to apologize for coming in this unconventional way. You can understand that I could only think of one thing; I didn't even wait for my mother to come with me, and I must hurry back to her. I ought to be getting to the station now, to wait for the next train."

"But may I remind you, Mademoiselle, that there is no train before midnight? You would

find no one in the station, and you can't do better than wait here till it is time for you to start. Perhaps it seems lonely, as Mme. Druault has taken nearly all the servants with her. I am lodging with the bailiff and his family at the other end of the park; in fact, I must ask you to excuse me, as I have to get back now, not to keep them waiting up for me."

O'Gorney was meeting all Henriette's possible objections.

"But is there no village near here?" she asked in a hesitating voice.

"The village is nearly three miles away."

Henriette grew more and more embarrassed, till at last O'Gorney solved the difficulty by ringing the bell.

"I must be going, Mademoiselle, and I leave you in the care of the servant you saw. She is rather clumsy and countrified, I'm afraid, but she is a good soul and did a great deal for Mme. Van Stilmont."

The woman came in. O'Gorney gave her some brief instructions, said good-night to Henriette, and disappeared. The hall door clanged behind him, and the sound of his footsteps died away.

"One must not expect much in the country," said the servant, who seemed more amiable,

"but Madame must ask for anything she wants."

Henriette refused all pressing invitations to have dinner and go to bed. She was so feverish with grief and agitation that it was useless to try and rest. She asked what time the train left, and found it did not go till 2.30 A.M. What a horrible position! She had come, and must go back without any kind of consolation. She had taken this dreadful journey without having been able to do anything for her dead friend. No last farewell, even to the coffined body; no last prayer, even over the newly closed grave. This impossibility to do anything, coupled with Mme. Van Stilmont's silence, seemed to emphasize the utter and final division of their lives. Mother Ste. Hélène had given her life for the children of a stranger; she had died in the care of a man still more strange to her in every sense of the word, and had accepted her last earthly succor from him. But she had asked nothing of the woman who had been as her own child, and had left no word of farewell for her. Even the worldlings and sinners had come before the renegade.

The shock of thinking of herself for the first time by such a name aroused Henriette for a moment from her grief. Then sorrow over-

whelmed her again; she longed for some means of paying respect to the dead.

"What I should really like," she said at last to the servant, who was still pressing hospitable offers on her, "would be for you to show me Mme. Van Stilmont's room."

The woman hesitated. "To-night?" she asked.

But the hesitation was short; country people are too practical to waste much time in superstitious fears. Neither to-night nor next day would "the room" be the least dangerous or alarming in any way. The coffin had been gone for some hours, and with it all traces of the accident and death. She thought it very silly of the young lady to want to go upstairs, but she couldn't refuse to take up any friend of Mme. Van Stilmont.

The electric light, just in process of being put in the chateau, was not yet working, and the ladders, tools, and wires, which had hastily been pushed into corners when the catastrophe happened, added to the general impression of newness and unfinished arrangements. The house seemed too new and young for death to enter, but the dark visitor had come, and everywhere the sense of calamity was still present.

The little lamp carried by the servant across

the hall gave a feeble light, the carved cabinets and the monumental architecture of oak balustrades were mere black masses in the shadow, and the unseasoned wood of the stairs creaked loudly at every step. Upstairs the faint light flickered over a passage, which still smelt strongly of fresh paint, and stopped before a sticky, varnished door. It was "the room." The servant's fingers trembled for a moment on the glass door-knob; then she went in, followed by Henriette.

It was quite an ordinary, commonplace apartment, the usual depressing "governess's room," partaking of the respectable bareness of a school dormitory, or a very inadequate hotel bedroom. The furniture was in pitch pine with light chintz curtains; a large table for the pupils occupied the center, and a small bed for the teacher stood in the corner. This was the bed on which Mme. Van Stilmont had died—had had the bad taste to die. A strong wind blew in from the wide-open windows, and the servant gave the lamp to Henriette while she went to close them.

"It would not be pleasant to be left here in the dark," she said, with an attempt at a smile, as she lit two candles on the mantelpiece. The room was now full of light, and Henriette was

able to discover some signs that Mme. Van Stilmont had once inhabited it.

Above a plain, rush-bottomed prieu-dieu, like a church chair, hung the great black crucifix with the Figure carved in white, from the Rue de Grenelle, and below it an engraving in a very simple passepartout frame, one of the reproductions of the Annunciation which each of the exiled nuns had taken from its nail in her convent cell.

Sister Charteron's picture had also been beside her deathbed. What had Sister St. Gabriel done with hers?

Henriette had kept it in her room in Paris at first; then it had to be sent away to have the frame mended, and had not been sent back. She remembered this detail while her companion was fumbling in the wardrobe with a mysterious expression.

"Look, Madame," she called to Henriette; "this is what she stopped the dog with."

The rustic cicerone, smiling politely, exhibited the debris of something which Henriette recognized with a terrible pang. It was the old sunshade, the handle broken in half, the wires twisted, and the silk in tatters. The poor, degrading object had become a solemnly precious possession, one of those relics which we shudder

to look upon. Now came the description which O'Gorney had spared her. The other witness, on the contrary, went into every detail with the pitiless realism of the popular mind, which instinctively loves to dwell on dramatic incident and forces the note of emotion and horror.

"When the poor lady was brought back, she was almost too horrible to look at. The dog had flown at her throat, she had two holes that size—and her face was a perfect jelly. She was bleeding all over—you could have followed the traces from the garden up here. Madame fainted at the sight of the blood on the stairs. The children yelled! Monsieur O'Gorney, who did everything for her, was as white as my apron, and so was the doctor when he caught sight of her! Monsieur le Curé was seized with a trembling fit while he gave her Extreme Unction. They weren't ordinary wounds, and with all the precautions they took, gangrene set in. The last day no one could endure to stay in the room; she noticed it, and as she was conscious to the end, she said to me, 'God bless you, my poor Jenny.' She did, indeed, Madame; I heard her."

Even this woman had a word and a look, thought Henriette with secret envy. As she watched the fat face, stained with tears and

twitching with sobs at the bare recollection, she could not help repeating her imploring question:

"Didn't Mme. Van Stilmont mention any one, or ask for any one?"

"She said the children were not to be allowed to hear too much about her, so as not to frighten them. The dear Lord knows she needn't have troubled about *that*. *They'll* never die of broken hearts. They all behaved abominably to poor Madame, and I couldn't have stood it, if I'd been in her place. Then she spoke once or twice of the other Sister who died lately, and seemed pleased to think she was going where she would meet her again. Well, I never see the like of her before. When they thought she was really going, she kept on saying Latin words. His Reverence and Monsieur O'Gorney understood what she said. Then she folded her hands, and it was all over!"

The woman had come to an end of all her dramatic effects, and now returned to practical common-sense.

"We mustn't stay up here any longer in this cold."

"But I would rather stay," said Henriette brokenly. "I want to pray here till it is time to go." She walked toward the prieu-dieu.

"But, Madame, you'll be frozen! You could say your prayers much better in some other room, with a good fire——"

"Well, won't you be so good as to make a fire here?"

Henriette knelt down, and the servant, accustomed to obey without remark, piled up logs and branches on the hearth, and when she had watched the flames steadily pointing upward, went quietly away to sleep till it was time for Henriette to go to the railway station.

The night was icy cold, and Henriette had to draw nearer to the fire, but even there she shivered with solitude and sadness in the death-chamber. She had foreseen what sinister sensations would come to her; and, with the instinct of her old habits of penance, had wished to expiate her weakness voluntarily. She would not spare herself one memory, even if oblivion had been possible, which it was not. The ink-stained table, still covered with school-books and untidy copy-books, spoke of the dreary hours which Mme. Van Stilmont had spent, cramping her noble mind and bending her tired body over the ungrateful task of teaching coarse, bad-tempered children, who were incapable of appreciating her, and yet had the right to take up all her time and intrude

into the most sacred privacy of her existence. Even the room did not belong entirely to the woman, who had once governed an entire convent of docile, gentle-mannered nuns.

And the children were not the worst trial; the mother and the grandmother had walked in and out at will, while the Superior, whose lightest word had been law to her spiritual daughters, had to listen in silence to imbecile remarks and insulting criticisms. Only at night could she be alone, and Henriette pictured the slim, upright figure meditating and recalling the past, as she sat on the low-seated, high-backed chair, gazing into infinity, her long, diaphanous hands lying open on her lap. She must have suffered horribly, more than any other woman in the same position, because of her strong and naturally haughty nature. But with stoic serenity, and a thirst for sacrifice, she had asked God to let her suffer still more. And He had heard her prayer, sending her bodily pain to crown her mental anguish.

Henriette turned her head, and saw lying on a chair the fragments of the old sunshade, which the servant had forgotten to put away; then her eyes wandered slowly to the bed under its chintz curtains, and gazed as if hypnotized at the place where they had laid her down.

There she had been brought bleeding, there she had suffered horrible agony for three days, there she had died between O'Gorney and a servant, and hands still rougher and more careless had put her in the coffin, which had been hurried away in fear and repulsion. Sister Charteron's fate had been enviable compared to this. At least there had been some semblance of friendship and family affection around the deathbed of Sister St. Louis. She had been pitied in her last illness, tended, and wept for, and her last earthly wish had been fulfilled. In her lifetime she had been allowed to see the fruits of her self-sacrifice, while this dead woman had passed intrepidly through absolute abnegation to death itself—for what?

The night closed in darker and colder than ever around Henriette, and her very soul seemed to sink within her. Was self-immolation no more than a sublime illusion? When she had been two years a novice and about to take her final vows a doubt had disturbed her; in those days she had treated it as a passing temptation and had gone to Mother Ste. Hélène for help. Then she had been revived by burning words, and such light had flooded her soul that in all her happy, peaceful hours

in the convent no shadow had ever crossed her mind again.

Even on her return to the world with all its distractions her first convictions had never left her. She knew that she had "taken the better part," even when she had made up her mind to accept the lower lot. But now her faith was shaken, and as she searched her mind for some explanation of the phenomenon she began to wonder if the light which had guided her in those days had been anything more than the reflection of Mother Ste. Hélène's own fiery enthusiasm, a glow from the heart of her Superior, which would now fade forever.

The night drew on, and Henriette felt colder and colder, and her head began to grow heavy. Sleep weighed down her eyelids. She kept dozing and opening her eyes, swayed between longing for rest and fear of nightmare, and with each waking the terrible reality faced her. The infinite silence of death and absence was beginning to prey on her nerves. The empty house resounded with the striking of hours and half-hours at such slow intervals that the girl felt her vigil of terror and misery would never end.

"If I could only pray!"

Pray for what—for whom? If the dead

woman had been but a sublime, deluded martyr, nothingness lay between them; if Mother Ste. Hélène's faith were true and she had gone to her reward, their separation would be none the less eternal.

Henriette could never equal the nun's heroic sacrifice in any of the circumstances of happy married life. The girl felt caught in a trap of agony, which was slowly closing and crushing her. Her brain refused to work; she could no longer collect her thoughts. Silence and night were about her, but the darkness was no longer of this world. Something invisible and impalpable was present to her—mystery and unknown forces were in the air. She tried to rise, then, fearing to come in contact with she knew not what, fell back into her chair and closed her eyes. But she could not close her ears. In the lonely room a voice was speaking. Gravely and distinctly came the words:

"Ecce Ancilla Domini."

At last wild, irrepressible curiosity dominated every other feeling in Henriette, and she turned around.

Near the bed, beneath the great black crucifix, a white-veiled figure was kneeling among the shadows; as it slowly arose Henriette recognized the long, trailing habit of the Nuns

of the Annunciation, and the unmistakable silhouette of the wearer.

"Mother Ste. Hélène!"

Her voice was no more than a stifled whisper, but a voice, *the* voice, answered: "It is I, your Mother."

The apparition stopped a few feet away from Henriette, and the girl was incapable of moving. She stood rooted to the spot in some new anguish before the still-veiled face. What if the veil were to be lifted, what if she had to look upon the lacerated face, the bleeding neck, the image of horror she had just heard described?

"Why are you here?" asked the voice sadly, "and what can you want of me, now you have repudiated all I could have bequeathed to you?"

An inspiration came to Henriette and dominated her terror.

"I ask to know the truth about my vocation, Mother; I want to know the truth, as you must know it now. You would not tell it me before, but you owe it me now."

Henriette waited in vain for the answer to the enigma sought so long in herself and from others, sought by Sister Charteron's bedside and under the trees of Lourdes, when she who

was then a living woman had refused to give Henriette more than vague hopes and illusory answers. There was no answer from the dead. The woman who knew all things now refused the word so imploringly begged for.

"You can read my heart!" Henriette cried in a despairing voice; "you can see the doubt which is torturing me; answer it! Tell me if I shall be guilty in taking earthly happiness, or mad to renounce it forever!"

The apparition extended a luminously transparent hand toward Henriette, and the voice, soft with an infinite gentleness and harmony, replied, "Have you forgotten that it is more blessed to give than to receive, that Our Lord will do unto you as you have done unto others, and that the highest wisdom is the folly of the Cross?" The hand touched Henriette on the breast, and it seemed to the girl as if a spark of fire penetrated the inmost fiber of her heart. And suddenly the flames of her old enthusiasm sprang up afresh, burning and consuming, as in some divine holocaust, all human cares, pre-occupations, and impediments. Henriette was delivered from all uncertainty and doubt; one question only was unanswered: "But you who gave everything, what did you obtain in exchange? What is your happiness?"

"My happiness?" The voice repeated the word with a thrill of infinite pity and a sort of proud and gentle disdain. Could heavenly happiness be compared in earthly language to anything in this world below? Could words describe what it has not been given to the heart of man to conceive?

The Nun of the Annunciation slowly lifted her veil. The poor, disfigured features had given place to a face shining with ecstasy, haloed in light, whose only resemblance to the mortal who had once been known to Henriette as Mother Ste. Hélène was in the adorable smile of indulgent pardon parting the lips of the dead nun. Henriette made a movement as if to throw herself on her knees—she stretched out her arms to seize and hold the vision.

But the figure had already melted into indistinct light and a pale ray from the moon was all that remained. One more appeal:

"Tell me how to reach you; tell me by what sacrifice I can hope to equal yours and obtain the same reward?"

The moonbeam was fast disappearing, but from the shadows came the voice once more:

"Life is not the greatest thing to sacrifice."

The mysterious saying, luminously clear to Henriette, did not even seem too hard. Her heart, full of its old enthusiasm, leaped in her breast, and the girl gladly offered up the gift of earthly love. She felt uplifted with a new and holy emulation. "To conquer the world by suffering and by love" had been the watchword of the Annunciation nuns on the day of their separation. Old Sister Charteron had fulfilled the ideal in her poverty and simplicity; in her martyrdom of humility and patience she had won over the souls of the coarse oppressors whom God had allowed to cross her path. Mother Ste. Hélène had gone still further; she had shed her blood, and had touched the hardest hearts. She had regained even the vacillating soul of one of her own daughters. Sister St. Gabriel was going to try and be worthy of them both.

"Fiat mihi secundum verbum Tuum."

As this pledge rose from the inmost depths of her being to her lips, she gave a loud cry, which echoed through the room and awoke her from her ecstasy. She found herself once more in the world of realities, trembling with emotion and cold, as one who comes out of a dream. If she had been dreaming, at least

Mother Ste. Hélène must have been very near her; the proof that the living and the dead had met was the girl's own heart, which was still burning with a fire never more to be extinguished on earth.

A quarter of an hour later a knock at the door warned her that she must leave, and having knelt once more before Mme. Van Stilmont's crucifix, she joined her friendly hostess, who, lantern in hand, was preparing to accompany her to the station.

"It's snowing a little, but the station's close by, and it would have been quite a business to take out any of the carriages and horses at this hour," remarked the worthy soul. She had quite made up her mind that she need not put herself out for this friend of the dead nun, who no doubt was a laicized sister, accustomed to drag about on foot; and Henriette carefully refrained from disabusing her mind of the idea. After all, was she not a woman who had once before taken perpetual vows of poverty, humility, and penance, and had she not renewed them again this very night? Her original sacrifice, offered in all the fervor of early youth, was nothing compared to the immolation of self that she was making now. In those days she

had hardly realized what she was renouncing, but now her eyes were fully open to joy and sorrow, too. She had tasted the beginning of a life of happy love, and of her own free will she was going to give it up, even if it broke her heart and shattered all the plans which others had made for her. She felt free with a new freedom and an unknown bliss as she walked triumphantly over the frozen ground, still beholding the radiant vision of the night, her broken, bleeding heart full of the bitter joys of the cup she was tasting. She had felt nothing like it, even on the day of her profession in the far-off chapel of the Rue de Grenelle. Even then her mystic espousals had not been fulfilled in the utter abnegation of herself. The day of days had dawned at last.

The booking-clerk was handing out tickets across the barrier when she got to the station.

"For Paris, Mademoiselle?" he asked, with a vague recollection of having seen the young lady before.

"No," said Henriette, "for Marseilles."

CHAPTER XV

LIFE

PAULA came in and sat down for a moment in the little drawing-room belonging to the two Régamus ladies, and then went out again, saying she was going to church, as there was still time before dinner.

She had been two days in Marseilles; each afternoon at dusk the same longing for solitude and peace had come over her, and she had crept into the little church which faced the Institut Régamus, and seemed expressly designed as a chapel for the school, which was a kind of lay convent, stricter than most religious houses. In the half-light of the nave Paula looked at the benches from which she had heard so many High Masses, Vespers, Complines, and sermons when she was one of the Régamus lambs, whose shepherdesses can not be said to have recalled Watteau to any great extent. Those days were indeed far away now, and the peculiar way in which Paula's life had been divided into different phases gave her the feeling of an old woman looking back

over her own youth. The final stage seemed to have been reached in Paris, and already the preoccupations, agitations, and sorrows of the last few weeks were beginning to lose the first edge of their keenness and to fade into the past. Hitherto, in meeting the abrupt changes of her destiny, Paula had felt buoyed up by some sort of hope for the future. But now her horizon was blocked by the steamer about to carry her away to an unknown life, which did not interest her enough even to arouse her curiosity. She was never coming back, she would never see any of the people she was leaving behind on the soil of her beloved France, and they would simply go on living normal, happy lives without her. She had chosen her path for herself; she had nothing to complain of, and she was glad to be going——

Here she burst into tears. There was no one to see her, no one would trouble to inquire what a poor little unknown girl was doing or thinking in a dark corner of the chapel with her head in her hands. It was a relief to drop the mask, to realize that separation and the pangs of parting were over, and that there was nothing left now but to suffer quietly and alone.

At the end of the church the beadle was beginning to clink his keys very gently, with due

regard to the prayers of the parishioners; and one by one dark shadows rose from behind pillars, genuflected before the altar, bent over the holy-water font, and disappeared in different directions. The clinking became louder and more insistent as two ladies still delayed.

Paula lingered in her seat waiting to be told she must go. At last she was aroused; but it was not the official "the church is going to be closed" that made her start up. She stood speechless before Henriette, who simply said: "Will you come with me, Paula?"

She followed her, and in the few minutes that passed before they could get down to the door and out into the street every possible conjecture which could explain Henriette's presence passed through Paula's brain.

"Is anything the matter with your mother?—Or my father?"

She was afraid to ask after any one else. Although she could not see Henriette's face clearly in the church or under the dark porch, she felt that there was something different about her cousin. Perhaps it was because Paula had never thought she should see Henriette again that she seemed transformed, as if the two had been parted for years.

"Don't be frightened," said Henriette.

"Nothing has happened to any one but me. I'll tell you everything, but not here. Come down."

They went down the church steps into the street, and Henriette took her cousin's arm.

"Tell me, Paula, could I stay the night with you? I am quite alone."

"Do you mean to say my aunt allowed you to come alone?"

"Maman doesn't even know I'm here."

Paula was utterly bewildered. That Henriette should develop a will of her own and start off on an escapade by herself was absolutely unexpected.

But she roused herself at the idea of her cousin being as lonely and out of her element as she was herself. "The old ladies will take you in," she said; "they can't refuse. And if they haven't got a room empty, there are two beds in mine."

They stopped at the house.

"I've been here already," explained Henriette. "I drove here as soon as I arrived, and they told me I should find you in the church."

The door of the Institut Régamus was slowly opened with an air of caution and mystery befitting the entrance to a cavern where treasures lay concealed; one hundred and fifty

innocent and beautiful young creatures were the riches at present protected by the heavy shutters of the refectory, and soon to be even more safely bestowed beneath the white curtains of the dormitory beds.

Henriette was shown into the little ground-floor sitting-room, where the three Régamus ladies, vigilant custodians of youth and innocence, glared upon her with the concentrated fire of six absolutely identical eyes. These ladies were all turned out of the same mold, the only difference being that the youngest, the Benjamin, had not presumed to grow as tall or as stout as her elder sisters, who had been majestic brunettes in their youth, and were now snowy-haired dowagers. The youngest, cautious in this as in everything else, had not ventured on more than a dash of gray in her coiffure. Schools established later on more modern lines had slightly eclipsed the ancient glories of the Institut Régamus, but the mistresses had become all the stricter and more dignified as their worldly riches diminished.

In spite of the favorable result of their scrutiny of Henriette, the two elder sisters welcomed her with a certain amount of caution and reserve, while the more easy-going Benjamin went off to give orders for her comfort. After

various ceremonious preliminaries dinner was served. Then the two girls were free to go up to their bedroom, which was furnished in the well-known symbolical style of the school, its dark walls and white curtains typical of austerity and innocence combined. Henriette shot the bolt, and looking at the twin beds, exclaimed, "Now we are as we used to be at Les Corbières!"

"Les Corbières" was a little manor-house in Normandy bought by Monsieur Marigny with the remaining proceeds of the sale of St. Germer, and afterward exchanged for a tumble-down house and grounds in Auvergne. Later on he had lived in an almost uninhabitable Provençal farmhouse, finally reaching, by a series of downward gradations, a ship's cabin and a colonial hut. Paula was softened by this reminder of a time when she was able to offer hospitality instead of always receiving it.

"Yesterday I little thought I should have you here to-night," she said.

"And I as little of coming."

"Well, but Henriette, why did you come?"

"To have a talk with you. If you still persist in going to-morrow, after all, it won't be with any mistaken ideas about me——"

"Oh, that's all, is it? A reconciliation before we part."

Paula spoke with all her old distrustful suspicion, and a new note of disappointment sounded in her voice. Henriette affected not to hear and made her sit down beside her. Seen at close quarters, Mlle. Le Hallier still showed the unmistakable and inexplicable change which had so struck Paula. A kind of gentleness and peace seemed to enwrap her and lift her above any possibility of misunderstanding. She took her cousin's hand in hers, as in the church.

"Paula," she said, "I see everything differently at last. I have only just discovered what a serious mistake I have made. I thought I could marry Jean. I was wrong. I can't."

Paula checked her first impulse and forced back words that had nearly crossed her lips.

"I know what this change must bring about," said Henriette, "and I must take the consequences. My mind is made up, and I am going to write to Jean and tell him so."

"But why do you come here and tell me first?" Paula was losing her self-control.

"For many reasons," and as Paula did not ask what they were, Henriette went on: "I understand at last all you have been resenting; let

me try and explain. I was doing harm, because I was not doing you good; you were disappointed and scandalized at me because you did not find me superior to you, and in a sense this was logical. You had a right to expect more than mere human affection, more than sisterly love in me, since I had joined those who have vowed to give up all and to accept nothing in return. After making such a profession as that I should not have failed to live up to it. No woman is obliged to do more than her duty, but having once chosen the highest, we can no longer be satisfied to do less. I fell below my own ideal, but I never ceased to regret it, although I was too weak to struggle up to it again. God has given me back my strength and my courage. Paula, I am going away again; but this time I shall leave no gap behind me. You won't miss me, you don't love me, you will feel no regret at bidding me good-by."

"Change! Go away! But it's too late—you can't!"

All Mme. Le Hallier's violence, her strong will, and vital energy came out in Paula. The girl forgot her resolutions and calculations, she broke down all barriers of reserve, and burst out with her indictment.

"Yes, I *did* think everything you say. In the beginning I wanted you to be different. But now I shall be even more unhappy. I shall be disgusted if you can change again. What! You have made Jean love you, you've even won over those poor babies, you've promised to devote yourself to them and to try and make them happy, and now you want to fail them and undo any good you may have done?"

Paula spoke with an indescribable accent of despair.

"I was in good faith when I made the mistake," replied Henriette, unmoved, her eyes clear and calm. "Jean will forgive me."

"And is that enough? What does his forgiveness matter, when you think of what he will suffer?"

"Was I born only to make others suffer?" whispered Henriette.

"Why do you say such things? *Mon Dieu!* What has come over you? Surely it is not I who have put these scruples into your head and changed your whole point of view?"

Paula, in the agony of such a thought, felt all her coldness and cruel reserve melting, and unconsciously the old sisterly feeling returned. "I wanted things to be as they used to be between us long ago. I want it now. I'll try,

I'll do my best; at a distance it will be easier for us. I'll never tell any one what you have said to-night; no one shall ever know that you contemplated such madness even for a moment. But give it up! Don't speak of going away—don't think of it any more. I grieved so when you went before—I who was only your little friend and sister! What would it be to Jean to lose you now?"

"It may be for his happiness," said Henriette in a low voice.

Paula was struck dumb. At the sight of the girl's dismay Henriette felt one more wave of bitterness.

"I see it now!" she cried. "I see I never loved him enough. I didn't love as women should love. I never loved him as you do!"

"I! Don't think that I——" But Paula could not defend herself, and Henriette was already calm again. Paula threw herself down on the sofa, burying her face in the cushion, as in her fits of childish rage. "Couldn't you let me go and die in peace?" she wailed.

"My little Paula, my little child that never could tell me a lie—I am staking all on your sincerity. If you will be quite open with me, all may yet be made right. You see, I have set you the example—I have confided in you.

Now confide in me; tell me how long you've loved him; tell me why and how you love him."

"But there is only way of loving—only one way."

Paula sat up; she looked straight in front of her, and the burning words came unevenly: "I loved him without thinking why—I only knew I loved him. It was from the first day, two years ago, when he came back so lonely and miserable. I loved him because I wanted to console him and make him happy again. I didn't look about for motives—I'm not a saint, I'm only a woman——" There was a somber fire in the depths of her sapphire eyes as she went on: "And a woman of my day. I knew all about life too early to mistake what I felt for him. I had pictured how everything would come around as I wished! I didn't want even him to know; he wouldn't have believed me or taken me seriously at my age, but later he would have understood me and known that it was the real thing. Aunt didn't care, in those days, what happened to him, or to me, or to any one else on earth, and she wouldn't have raised any obstacles. There *were* none till you came back."

"But, my poor child, it was your fault for not giving me some hint or some vague idea of

what was going on. You would never explain, and you did your best to prolong the dreadful misunderstanding between us. Why? What was your object?"

"Because there was nothing else I could do for Jean's good. You force me to put things plainly. With you in the convent I was the heiress; when you came out I was a pauper! Jean has no money, he has his children to bring up, and I didn't want to bring any more misery on him by leading him into an imprudent marriage. It was not too late to do my duty, and as for myself, I didn't stop to think what it would cost me to break myself of loving him. I only thought of him."

Paula was transfigured. Human love had touched a height of abnegation where even Henriette's mystic aspirations could not eclipse it.

"That is not all. When I saw how sweet and gentle you were, and how much better suited to him in age than a girl of eighteen, and when I found out from Aunt that he had been in love with you before you became a nun, I told myself that you were the one to make him happy, and I gave up the struggle. All I did was to save my pride by trying to disgust him with me, before he should turn naturally to

you. I made myself appear as wild and scatter-brained as possible, that he might have nothing to regret, and to spare myself the insult of his pity. I did it all for the best. How could I imagine that things would turn out like this, and that he would be left more lonely and miserable than ever in the end?"

"No, Paula, he will be neither lonely nor miserable. Now I know for the first time what you alone could have told me."

She drew Paula to her. "My mother told you that Jean used to be in love with me; that is not true. It was I who loved him. My love was too timid and hesitating to win his. I have learned since to love him with all my affection and trust, and with all the strength that could still bind me to life. But I see now that even that is not enough; love should be more strong and simple; if it is to be great and holy there must be forgetfulness of self. Every love is a mountain-top from which we may aspire to reach God; man and wife may love Him in each other. Dear little Paula, I thank you for taking away my last doubt and my only regret."

"Then you'll stay?"

The sincere delight on Paula's little drawn face was so wonderful in its almost superhuman

unselfishness that Henriette felt inclined to kneel down before her. The ideas which she had so clearly and definitely put into words seemed wavering now.

"It's the great thing, after all, isn't it," she said, "to make a sacrifice for the happiness of the man one loves? You want to go away to leave others to be happy, so you will understand why I went away before and why I'm going now. You can't call me quixotic or over-generous now, at any rate. The only people who think great resolutions absurd are those who are incapable of great deeds. But one does not always believe in one's own courage or motives, and example is the only way by which to learn how far we are really ready to go. Some soldiers dread the first shot, and then when they see their comrades and their officers ride into danger they follow and are brave, too. Little Paula, you are setting me an example."

Paula lifted up an astonished face, and Henriette calmly answered her look with a happy, peaceful smile.

"This is the last night. We must sleep, so as to be strong for to-morrow."

They undressed in silence and lay down on the two little hard school beds. But as soon as the light was out Henriette heard little bare

feet pattering over the floor and felt two arms around her neck.

"Henriette!"

Under cover of the darkness Paula was brave and could say what she had been ashamed to put into words before.

"It wasn't even a complete sacrifice, for I couldn't help being jealous of you. You've wiped even that out by giving me back my self-respect."

"Come close to me, as you used to when you were a little child," and as Paula's slender little body nestled up to her, Henriette felt the same maternal pity that had overwhelmed her when she held Linette in her arms. Paula, too, was a poor, sick, motherless child, but she was going to get well.

"It was I who persuaded you to stay!" she kept repeating rapturously; "it was I who did it, so I've been able to do one more thing for Jean, after all."

And now, having laid bare the whole aim of her love and sacrifice, natural fatigue overtook her, and she slept the profound sleep of one who has been exhausted by sorrow.

The hours of the night passed, and Henriette lay motionless, but without any wish or need for sleep. She was going over in her mind the

events of the night she had spent face to face with memories of the dead, and realizing that life and its problems had now to be faced with equal courage and unshakeable resolve. She foresaw all that was coming, and planned out her line of action down to the smallest details.

When the clock of the little church opposite struck six she got out of bed very quietly, dressed noiselessly in the dressing-room, and coming back into the bedroom where Paula was still asleep in the dark, sat down by the door and waited.

She did not have to wait long. Seven had hardly struck when stifled sounds of a commotion in the distance fell on her listening ears, and soon the worn boards of the passage outside creaked beneath a muffled footstep. Henriette came out of the room to find one of the Régamus Sisters, looking more than usually majestic in a long violet dressing-gown, and glaring at her from a pair of suspicious and very sleepy eyes.

"Mademoiselle, your mother has come to fetch you—at this hour of the morning!"

Such an enormity had never happened before as a mother coming before daybreak to take her daughter away from the Institut Régamus. It was enough to make one sus-

pect that an establishment which in thirty years had never known the breath of scandal had at last harbored a stray, nay, even a black, sheep among its flock of spotless lambs. The culprit was perfectly unabashed.

"Is Maman in the sitting-room downstairs? I'll come down; there is no object in waking Paula."

In the last forty-eight hours Mme. Le Hal-lier had completely lost all the peace of mind and mental repose which she had regained since her daughter came back to her. The lamplight showed Henriette the gaunt figure of a wild-eyed, haggard old woman, a physical as well as a mental wreck.

"At last!" she was beginning, before Mlle. Régamus had time to get out of the room; and when the violet dressing-gown finally disappeared the flood was unloosed.

"I have been like a mad woman for two days! Of course, directly I found your note I started to follow you, and I took the next train, a dreadful one with no first-class carriages. When I got there you'd gone. I thought you were back at home, and no suspicion would have crossed my mind if the woman at the Druaults' had not answered my questions by calling

you 'the young lady who went back to Marseilles.' At the time I didn't notice what she said, and only thought she'd made a mistake, but I remembered her words when I got home and found you weren't there, to my surprise and horror. I started again for Marseilles, still an hour or two behind you. What are you doing here, giving me all this awful anxiety? You seem loving to me, you kiss me, you clasp me in your arms, but that doesn't satisfy me—you're frightening me! You've got some idea in your mind, I can see it in your face. You're hiding something——"

"I'll tell you everything, dear Maman. But—are you alone?"

So direct a question embarrassed Mme. Le Hallier. "I suppose Jean brought you," said Henriette placidly; "perhaps he is waiting outside?"

"He is. I left him in the carriage."

"Will you send for him to come in? I owe you both an explanation, and I had better speak to you both at the same time."

Jean des Vernières came in.

This was a second cause for scandal, worse than the first; a man, not a professor of anything, coming at this hour of the morning into a young ladies' school! Fortunately the class-

room windows did not look out on the courtyard, and, as good luck would have it, every door was tightly shut. No one could tell what was passing in the little isolated sitting-room, and the Régamus ladies themselves, with all their experience, were, if they had only known it, miles away from guessing the facts.

Jean, like Mme. Le Hallier, bore traces of the two terrible days he had passed, but he was outwardly calm, and instead of pressing for an explanation, seemed to dread what he was about to hear.

"I have given you a dreadfully anxious time, too, my poor Jean," began Henriette.

"What does that matter—it's over!" he said hurriedly, staring with anxious eyes at the girl, as if he noticed the change which Paula had been the first to see.

"But it's not quite over yet," continued Henriette.

The stiff little room, with its ill-assorted furniture and commonplace ornaments, had witnessed most of the usual scenes of childish grief, and had seen many tears shed at parting from parents or failing in examinations, but the Régamus school parlor had never before been the scene of such an agony of suspense. Even Mme. Le Hallier was afraid to break the

silence which followed Henriette's words, and it was Jean who spoke at last.

"Henriette, do explain!"

But Mme. Le Hallier made one last effort to protect the edifice she had erected and to stop her daughter from speaking what she felt would be irrevocable words.

"Don't you understand her?" she asked. "You know the loss she has just had and what she must have felt. She has come here out of a scruple of conscience to see the last of Paula, as a duty, and she tried to keep me from stopping her. She could not let us know, as we have been on the move for two days. One gets so easily frightened at a distance, and then it all seems nothing when you're on the spot."

"But I am more anxious than ever since I got here," said Jean.

There was another of those silences which warn us that a catastrophe is at hand, and then Henriette turned slowly to Jean.

"I am going to give you great pain. Forgive me! My only excuse is that it hurts me as much as it does you. I was so fond of you, dear Jean, I loved you so, dear Maman, that to please you both I attempted the impossible. I have to confess that I can't go through with it——" A sob choked her voice. "Jean, I

shall never be your wife, and it would not be for your happiness that I should marry you. You also have made a mistake."

He turned white, but the sight of the effort it cost Henriette to speak roused all his manliness and loyalty.

"I don't know what change has taken place in you," he said, "but for my own part, I know of no mistake that I should undo. I love you, Henriette. I offer you my life and I am as sincere as I was yesterday and shall be tomorrow. Your life already is so far pledged to me that I have the right to protect myself and you against a mere unjustifiable caprice."

"It is true that I have pledged my life to you, but what if it be not mine to give?"

"Henriette!" screamed Mme. Le Halier, "are you mad?"

"What if I do not look upon myself as a living woman?" continued Henriette, laying her little ice-cold fingers in Jean's hand.

"Do you remember the day they said I was a ghost? Why did we not understand then? Ever since I came back to the world I have realized that I am a ghost. You loved the shadow, the specter of a woman, and you would soon have found it out."

Pale and gentle under the crown of her

golden hair, she looked, in the gray dawn that was just breaking, like a creature from another world, a more than human peace on her face, and a solemnity in the very gesture of her crossed hands. Mme. Le Hallier, fighting to the last to dispel the unmistakable impression, threw her arms around her daughter and clasped her with furious energy.

“Don’t say such horrible things before me, your mother! Don’t dare say that the life I gave you is not as vital as the blood that runs in other women’s veins! I can feel it, for it is my own. I am living in you, my pride, my joy, flesh of my flesh! And your life belongs to Jean, too. We will give you our love, our very soul, if need be, to make up for what has been taken from you; we will warm and revive you, and rouse you from the death-like sleep that has benumbed you. You had almost become your old self again! This is only a relapse, and I will nurse you back to life as I did in your bad illness long ago. You will be cured forever when you belong to Jean. You will love him more and more and lose your identity in his love for you, as I was merged in your father’s love for me in those blessed years we spent together. You are all that is left to me from those days, and you can give me back the

happiness I felt when he was alive. All I ask of you, it is not much, is to be what you were two days ago—only two days! Two days is nothing—in two days you can't have forgotten everything you loved, and all the promises you made!"

"Maman—you are only giving me fresh pain—let me speak to Jean."

"Yes, speak to him, Henriette."

Mme. Le Hallier turned away with a bitter sense of her own helplessness in the hour of destiny, and knowing that her very impotence came from having tried to mold their fate with her own hands. She had always staved off the inevitable shocks and friction which would before long have revealed to each the mistake which both had made. And now they were alone at last, face to face with the pitiless truth.

"Dear Jean, I don't deny all I owe you, but if I give you what costs me peace and happiness, would you take such a gift?"

"Speak plainer," said Jean. "You mean you don't love me."

"I loved you as much as was possible to a woman like me, but I couldn't love you enough to take back the gift I had once offered to Almighty God. You felt this, too, dear; you real-

ized the divine allegiance, and it hurt you. Although we managed to satisfy our consciences, you know, you *must* remember what constraint there was between us, and how we were never at our ease or natural with each other. Have you not often seen Sister St. Gabriel's veil hiding me from you?"

"What matter? Even if this were true, why should your past trouble me? Henriette—you must hear it now—that veil made a halo for you in my sight. What I loved best in you was just that difference between you and other women; it lifted you above them, and there was something of the angel, something of an unfulfilled ideal always clinging to you——"

"But when that halo and ideal had left me? When, following the laws of Nature, I should have become as other women, perhaps inferior to them, you would no longer have found that charm in me, and I should not have even equaled them in goodness and energy in well-doing."

"But you already have the energy and the impulse to do good. What was it but the maternal instinct that drew you to my orphan children, to my poor little cripple, whom only a mother would have loved best!"

"That, too, was a mistake." Henriette's voice faltered as she forswore maternal love, after giving up the love of wife to husband. "I thought it was because they were your children, but it was for the love of God, and for His sake my heart would always go out to any of His other suffering and afflicted children. It was not maternal instinct waking in me, but another vocation which God was sending to console me for all I had lost, and perhaps for what I am giving up now. I am a nun—I can never be anything else—and though there are no more Sisters of the Annunciation, there are still Sisters of Charity."

Madame Le Hallier gave a loud cry.

"You are going into another convent, to kill yourself and me too?"

The poor woman had learned her lesson. She knew that anger and coercion were useless weapons now, but she could still try to work upon Henriette's tender, loving nature. With eyes streaming with tears, she began fumbling like a blind woman in her little traveling-bag, and dragging herself to the table, she put down a blue jeweler's box, which Henriette recognized directly, between a bronze statuette of Homer and a rock-crystal inkstand.

"Here is your engagement-ring; the jeweler

sent it home yesterday, and we were bringing it to you."

She sat down again and sobbed; then a sudden impulse of anger roused her: "Jean!" she exclaimed, "you didn't know how to keep her; you don't know how to fight for her!"

"What can I do more?" he answered. Then he knelt down and held out the ring to Henriette. She looked first at the diamond sparkling in his hand, and then at the two great tears shining in his eyes. The ideal of her girlish love, the boy for whom at twenty she had broken her heart, was there before her, shedding a man's tears in his maturity; the dream of her youth and the tenderness and trust of later life were all within her reach once more. In the father's wet eyes shone the tears of his children, who loved her and cried out to her to come and take her earthly happiness at his hands. She took the ring, but did not put it on.

"I have a ring already, Jean. It was put on my finger the day I was professed, and I shall never take it off. Another woman has a right to wear this one; a woman who will make you as happy as you deserve to be, who will love you as you ought to be loved, and who loves you already."

Mme. Le Hallier saw one last chance: "I

knew you were keeping something back!" she cried. "Jean, she wants to sacrifice herself to some one else's happiness, at your expense, and at the expense of your children's future. Who else could be as devoted and as helpful as Henriette, who else could be such a mother to Linette?"

Some violent emotion swept over Jean; he broke in on Mme. Le Hallier's explanations. "Did you believe that I did, or could, love any woman but you, Henriette?"

Their eyes met—Jean's burning with reproachful loyalty, Henriette's calm, sweet, and penetrating, their gaze searching his very soul.

"You did not know the other woman, perhaps," she answered, "if you thought you had found her in me. She can give you all you are asking for in vain; I am the ghost, the specter—she is life. But I thought of her as a consolation and a new hope for you, and it is only for my own sake that I am asking you to give me back my freedom."

"He shan't give you up." Mme. Le Hallier still fought in her lost cause with tears and oburgations. But the fight was over; Jean scorned to weary Henriette any further, now he understood that her heart and will were turned definitely away from him.

"Stop!" he said bitterly at last; "you wish her to be happy—let her be happy in her own way. She has been accustomed for so long to look beyond this world and our ordinary existence, that she would be a prisoner with me. I came into her life too late, when no man could be everything to her."

"Maman," said Henriette, "I tried to be happy in your way. Now let me choose my own way, the only real happiness I know."

"Then you can only be happy away from me!" said Mme. Le Hallier with one last despairing cry of human passion. Then maternal instinct came to her rescue, the pure instinct of abnegation and self-sacrifice.

"Well, then, be happy; that is all I ask!"

Time had passed by unheeded. The gloomy little sitting-room was now bright with winter morning sunshine, and the mysterious building, the strongly fortified shelter of so much beauty and innocence, could no longer completely conceal its treasures. Fresh young voices floated in the air, scales and piano exercises sounded like the twittering of birds in a nest, and the Régamus ladies began to be in a hurry to get rid of the trespassers in their virgin forest. The door half opened, revealing a white head, now elaborately curled and dressed, and a

quiet black costume in place of the violet dressing-gown.

"Mademoiselle Marigny must go, or she will miss the steamer."

"Where is she? Send her here."

"She will miss the steamer!" reiterated Mlle. Régamus, her voice growing more and more tragic.

Henriette brought Paula into the room; the girl was trembling at the sight of the three there together, and she drew back. But her cousin led her to the chair where Mme. Le Hallier had thrown herself.

"Paula, my poor mother will soon have no daughter; this time she is not losing me, but giving me freely back, and you are her only prop and stay. Can you leave her alone? Can you be so cruel as to go away from her?"

"You know I must go!" whispered Paula.
"You *know* I must go."

"Jean, tell her her duty is here."

Jean pointed to Mme. Le Hallier. Henriette stood between them, her fair head in a halo of sunshine, her gentle eyes full of the joy of a saint whose aureole is of more imperishable substance than the most glorious stained-glass of any church.

"I am going away," she said. "Let me leave

you without bitterness; let the last sight of me be remembered as my two sisters gone before me are remembered. They left an example behind them. Oh, how much happier this parting is than the first!" She turned to Paula with a smile and spoke her last words in a really happy human voice.

"Do you remember that when I went to the Annunciation I wanted to leave you something to remember me by, a little bit of jewelry such as young girls can wear? You were so angry, and such a naughty girl, that you threw it into the lake at St. Germier. Now you know better how to behave, you must accept what I am giving you; you won't throw it away because I gave it to you; on the contrary, you will care for it all the more."

And before Paula could stop her, Henriette slipped on her cousin's finger the circle of blazing diamonds, her engagement ring.



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CIRCULATES

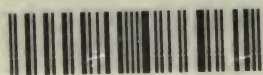
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